

**'THE CHILDREN OF MARX AND COCA-COLA':
ADVERTISING AND COMMERCIAL CREATIVITY**

by

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B.Sc. (Hons), The Nottingham Trent University, 1988

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Abstract

This thesis is about advertising. More specifically, it is concerned with *advertising* rather than advertisements; with *process* rather than content. The central claim is that, in order to fully understand the social and cultural significance of advertising as a major cultural institution, we must take into consideration the role of the advertising process and, in particular, the contribution of advertising creatives to that process.

The major routines of the culture of consumption have long since abandoned a strictly rational approach as their primary mode of address. Furthermore, they are increasingly reliant on the specialist expertise of 'cultural' workers, who inevitably draw on their own experience as consumers - and who possess the skills to design commercial communications which appeal through emotional and empathetic resonance.

Analysis centres on an investigation of the nature of commercial creativity, recognized in a particularly influential stratum of occupations which includes advertising, film, and the media more generally. In addition, contemporary culture is treated as a circuit in which meanings and values are transferred and transformed as they are carried by advertising messages from production, to consumption, and back again.

An emergent theme is the stress and anxiety associated with the role of creative intermediaries, and indeed the business as a whole, conceived as an exercise in the management of uncertainty. Cinema, a medium in which creative constraints are much less marked, has served as a forum for the expression of some common frustrations habitually experienced by all commercial creatives. A number of films are examined in detail with this assertion in mind.

The most pressing conclusion is that those in advertising and other creative occupations (such as screen-writing, graphic design, fashion, and style journalism) must be assessed collectively as an esoteric yet highly influential group of workers with much in common - and much to tell us about the production and continual *reproduction* of contemporary cultural values.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to J.T.,

(and B.R., if he's reading).

Thanks also to M.S.K. for encouragement.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank Steve Kline for believing I had something useful to say.
I also accept full responsibility for the way in which I've attempted to say it.

Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Introduction: My Brief Career: A prehistory by way of an introduction.....	1
1. The Fetishism of Advertising.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Critical Departures.....	15
Culturalist Responses.....	24
Towards a Remedy.....	30
2. Advertising Production and Private Knowledges: The 'No-Collar' Worker.....	37
Introduction.....	37
Section One: Sociological Perspectives.....	38
Section Two: Professional Perspectives - A Case Study.....	53
Conclusions.....	65
3. The Film Text: Advertising Production as Public Knowledge.....	69
Introduction.....	69
Films about Advertising 1947-1992: A case study.....	76
i) Gray Flannel Films: The post-war advertising industry in the movies.....	77
ii) The New Consumer Society on Celluloid.....	87
iii) Creative Angst Hits The Big Screen.....	95
Further Discussion: How (and why) Bagley got ahead in advertising.....	102
Conclusions.....	106

4. Defetishizing Advertising: Creativity and the Circuit Reconsidered112

 Introduction: The Short Circuit112

 Switching Circuits: Towards Social Change115

 Concluding Arguments: Towards a Critical Theory of Commercial Creativity126

 Further Research137

Appendix 1: The Short Circuit142

Appendix 2: English-language Films about Advertising: A chronology143

Appendix 3: English-language Films about Advertising: By sub-genre145

Bibliography147

Introduction

My Brief Career: A prehistory by way of an introduction

As a teenager, reading both Karl Marx and 'Honey' magazine, I couldn't reconcile what I knew with what I felt. This is the root of ideology, I believe. I knew I was being 'exploited', but it was a fact that I was attracted.

Judith Williamson
Decoding Advertisements (1978:9).

The original motivation for this thesis stems from my personal experience in the advertising business. The choices I made getting into it - and my subsequent reasons for leaving - should, I hope, provide some indication as to the nature of the arguments presented in the following pages. That the drive to produce this work should derive from expressly personal experience is not unusual; indeed, it appears to be an unavoidable consequence of attempting to critique a phenomenon which affects all of us in our daily lives.

The literature I have encountered often makes reference to the need to make sense of intensely private contradictions. For example, Judith Williamson's disphoria (above) is echoed in Martin Lee's troubled ruminations: "The more I thought about my own relationship to consumption, the more ambiguous my reaction to it seemed to become. On the one hand commodity consumption often provided a source of genuine pleasure and enjoyment which I was reluctant, and indeed saw no reason to deny. On the other hand, I knew that no form of commodity was socially neutral" (Lee 1993:xi). Thinking and writing about consumption, advertising, and the problem of commercial creativity in contemporary society therefore demands - in ideal terms - a response which can account for both conceptual *and* personal dilemmas.

As a child I was fascinated with the sheer zest and bravado of advertising posters; their crisp typography, bold images, and witty ideas. At one time I even wrote to several

billboard companies with the idea of using them to decorate my bedroom walls. (Cinema posters also excited me, and the grotesque and tortured faces of *Midnight Express* and *Pink Floyd's The Wall* already stared at each other across the room.)

When it finally arrived on my doorstep, the jocular image of a cartoon character crawling to - and then past - a bar in the middle of the desert ('Once you discover Perrier, nothing else will do') proved impossible to display: the roadside poster was printed in twelve sections, each one the size of a blanket. I resolved to rotate the parts, hanging one piece up at a time. Meanwhile, the severed headline from another famous poster ('Heineken refreshes the parts other beers cannot reach') ran around the entire room.

Advertising is a lively and attractive art. Had I known at the time that real people spent their entire working days dreaming these things up, I might have been unable to conceive of any other future for myself: here was a job which carried the promise of allowing me to capitalise on my early aptitudes for science and art; the rational *and* the aesthetic. In short, I could become an artist *and* have a career. As it turned out, I was already in the midst of an engineering degree when my early fascination was rekindled. Appropriately enough the catalyst was a magazine advertisement, which extolled the virtues of a London art school dedicated to training designers, art directors, and copywriters; and, as if to prove their point, the ad had actually been written by some of its current students. The promise of one intensive (and expensive) year spent rubbing shoulders with advertising 'gurus', while dreaming up ground-breaking ad campaigns, proved instantly beguiling. After all, according to the school's philosophy, *anyone* could be an ad creative: your background didn't matter and you didn't even have to be able to draw; furthermore - as everyone knows - the rewards were potentially astronomical. To get an interview and to win a place, I immediately began writing ads which I thought emulated all the wit and cleverness of a short lifetime's experience of consuming advertising. It appears that I learnt my lessons well, since I was able to join the program soon after graduating in engineering.

At this time I had little or no conception of the social or cultural ramifications of advertising, and, unlike the precociously politicized teenager that Judith Williamson had been, I remained blissfully unaware of the lively and earnest debates in the social sciences and humanities which continued apace even as I began my first job in the business. In a period of four years, I worked as an art director and designer on accounts for computers, cable TV, soft drinks, and alcohol, at two different agencies. All this time I sought to realize the potential I knew I had, and, like several hundred others in London at any given time, kept trying to capture the adroitness of favorite ads and the brilliance of award-winning campaigns. My enthusiasm for such inventiveness belied nascent doubts about the usefulness of what I was doing.

A pivotal moment occurred in 1989, the year the movie *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* was released. This British film was a scathingly satirical attack on advertising and it had a profound effect on me. Stunned by its hugely cynical clowning, the unspecified discomfort I thought of as simply 'part of the job' suddenly turned malignant. The movie's writer/director had succeeded in crystallizing a personal dilemma I had barely acknowledged until then (*and* had eloquently demonstrated to me the alternative uses to which creative energy might be put).

My commitment to creativity, and the holy grail of riveting ideas, simply expressed, was in fact an ideology no deeper than the paper upon which I attempted to record them. The moral or ethical dimension of a classically-conceived model of the artist as critical or oppositional voice had not been - could not be - a part of my training. At this art school we had learned fast: the names of the best agencies in town; the 'hottest' creatives around; the seminal campaigns of each decade. Our constant efforts to emulate or surpass these award-laden icons had left us little time - and little desire - to consider an eventual audience. In my short career, these people were never more than codified items on a briefing form: abstractions of socio-economic group; age; gender; or 'relationship to product'.

To illustrate: a friend I'd had at college, who by now has been at Saatchi & Saatchi for a number of years, was recently interviewed in a newspaper article focusing on an ad he had just written. Why was it, asked the journalist, that while Calvin Klein's dubious new jeans campaign - for all its intimations of child pornography - was universally accepted for publication, my old colleague's 'charity' ad had been flatly rejected by many newspapers? (I should add that the reason for banning his advertisement for Anti-Slavery International was not entirely without foundation, since its headline bawled: 'Read this you piece of shit'.)

Contrary to initial expectations, the journalist (who is deputy editor of *Campaign*, the British advertising trade journal of record) rounded on the ad's creator, refusing to see anything commendable in his professional commitment to a client's worthy cause: "Asked if anything offended him, Campbell replies 'only patronising ads'. These three words highlight the problem for the mostly young, London-based, cosmopolitan creatives in advertising. There is a significant gulf between them and some of their consumers" (Hatfield 1995:11). (I can fully imagine consoling my old colleague for the stupidity of a system which had stymied his great idea, while our shared indignation would be further fuelled by the altruistic overtones of his efforts.)

How *are* ethical or moral misgivings rationalized - particularly by those who have reached positions of pre-eminence in the business? An instructive example concerns Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury - which was one more company name in our art college incantations of ad agencies with glowing creative reputations. Their innovative work continues to attract media attention, controversy - and awards. Adam Lury, one of the co-founders, has recently commented on the "deep sense of conflict and shame" that advertising professionals have 'internalized' (Lury 1994). Echoing the nature of my own earlier predicament, Lury then asks his specifically *academic* audience to "[r]emember that many of these people were not taught the critical constructs that allow them to ask 'Whose view

of society?' 'Which part of "society's" view?' or to see that 'reflecting' society is a positive act of reinforcing one particular view of society" (1994:92). As the observations of an educated mind, Lury is excusing his peers for their limited perception. However, several paragraphs earlier, he notes that "[m]ost people who currently hold power in advertising agencies and who are directly involved in the production of advertising are university educated" (*ibid*:91). We must then ask if he is an exception - intellectually and educationally - or if this 'internalized shame' in the business is more widespread (and less recognized as such) than he might otherwise suggest.

Regardless, it is higher education which Lury blames for his, and his contemporaries' - moral and ethical uneasiness. In particular, it was "a considerable academic contempt for advertising" which instilled in them such self-doubt. As if presaging some of the most entrenched scholarly arguments of the past few decades, Lury actually suggests that more recent theoretical developments offer collective salvation: "I believe that this shame will disappear gradually as 'cultural studies' and its attendant interest (and consequent legitimization) continues and its graduates and their peers find their way into media careers" (*ibid*).

For Lury, then, we must presume that it is clearly the fault of a specifically *critical* academe that 'most' key ad-people have troubled consciences. Appropriately enough, in Tom Frank's recent indictment of cultural studies, he suggests that it "performs the classic duties of the university, acquainting the children of the well-to-do with their proper roles. Cultural Studies aims simply to teach us to be 'good' fans and consumers" (1995:29). This is, of course, a polemical stance which also succeeds in trivializing the vital contribution that has been made in developing a better understanding of contemporary life outside of work. For many people, to consume is to explore the expressive dimension of culture; however 'bad' or misguided it might be judged to be, the pursuit of a personal 'lifestyle' is hugely

meaningful - if not vital - for the vast majority of people who have the means to do so. As I shall argue, this is particularly true for advertising creatives.

The so-called 'aestheticization of everyday life' (Featherstone 1992) is implicated in (or merely accompanied - depending on one's scholarly allegiance) the rise of advertising to its established role as a formidable cultural institution. In explaining this phrase, Featherstone refers to "the pursuit of new tastes and sensations and the construction of distinctive lifestyles"; "the centrality of the commercial manipulation of images through advertising, the media and the displays, performances and spectacles of the urbanized fabric of daily life [which] therefore entails a constant reworking of desires through images" (1992:67-8). In the post-modern frame, writers such as Baudrillard have claimed that everything is 'undecidable'; that advertising is 'bewildering'. How was I to make sense of these claims having stepped out from behind a mirror which appeared to hold some theorists in such *opaque* rapture?

Since advertising apparently finds legitimation and exoneration through cultural studies and post-modernism, it is perhaps unsurprising that, in continuing to problematize the institution, I must bolster the specific debates highlighted in this thesis by counterpoising a pointedly *critical* scholarly heritage. Rather than subjecting its advertisements to autopsy, or its audiences to interview, this has sometimes led us to knock on the front door of the institution of advertising itself. However, rarely has *anyone* ventured over the threshold in anything like the confident manner in which advertising has persistently invaded our public and private spaces. As for culturalist approaches, Frank, at least, would claim that "cultural production is not a valid subject of study: meaning, it is understood, is made by the readers of texts, not their producers, hence one will find few references in the Cultural Studies oeuvre to works that focus on the operations of the advertising, film, or broadcasting industries" (Frank 1995:29). Historically, it would appear that *critical* approaches, on the

other hand, have barely been able to suppress an underlying tone of disgust; either way, much remains to be done.

The term 'creative' is pivotal to this thesis. Its specific nature can now be understood as being something radically different from 'artistic' since, with its specifically commercial overtones, the former term is at once eviscerated of any deeper ideological underpinnings; in this sense, the 'commercial artist' is an oxymoron. However, 'creativity' does not lack *all* dimensionality, since its role is both pragmatic and aesthetic, being defined here as the combined artistic and conceptual skills for which certain persons are *primarily* employed in profit-oriented enterprises.

The pragmatic aspect plays a major role in economic conceptions of society, in which advertising has a communicative role in keeping consumers informed about products and services available in the market; as Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi¹ has recently argued in *Creativity* (1996), it can be conceived as a practical quality with important applications in science and business. The aesthetic dimension concerns the expressive and interpretive possibilities of cultural life explored in the subtly didactic work of the advertising creatives.

To return briefly to my own biography: the canonical texts I discovered on my return to university 'hailed' me - or frustrated me - by turns, as I attempted to place my experience in a critical framework. A key moment was marked by Mike Featherstone's *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1992), or, more particularly, Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984). Featherstone had expanded on an earlier concept of Bourdieu's which for me had a startling resonance: advertising creatives, and those in comparable occupations such as fashion or design², were to be understood as a 'class fraction' - a coherent and recognizable stratum he called the 'new cultural intermediaries'. Here was an analytical approach which

¹Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1996) *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*, New York, HarperCollins.

²An extensive list of contiguous occupations, partially drawn from the literature and partly from personal experience, appears in Chapter Four.

finally provided some concrete ways in which to think about the place of advertising personnel in debates about cultural and social life. This could then be used to complement the voluminous - and more popular - work which had already been done on advertisements³.

The 'product' of the advertising 'business' or 'industry' is uniquely orientated to invite formalized approaches to its analysis; the cryptic content of advertisements is readily discernible and apparently authorless. The opportunity it provides for the expert to 'speak' on its behalf is both self-evident and irresistible. While this thesis does not in any way attempt to discredit this work, personal experience has demanded that the whole field of advertising be thought about in alternative ways. The usefulness of the resulting ideas and arguments has been confirmed, at least for me, in that it has allowed for the identification of some additional factors which help to explain why many scholars - myself included - have arrived at this rather pluralistic nexus in our understanding of advertising and the culture of consumption.

The analysis offered in this thesis is a specific attempt to be inclusive; that is, not necessarily to *reconcile* populist (or even post-modernist) critique with critical engagement, nor to reduce them, but to acknowledge the possibilities and limitations of each avenue - and to make the best of their strengths. To some extent these rival knowledges reflect the personal fascination/repulsion dichotomy discussed in this introduction; it remains to be seen whether the resultant hybrid - a kind of 'grounded non-modernism' - is of any lasting potential value.

In Chapter 1 I briefly review some of the key theoretical arguments in the literature on advertising, production, and consumption, and go on to develop an approach based on the

³There are a great many texts, and the list now appears to be subject to a prevailing fashion for 'books about advertising'. Rather than provide an exhaustive list, the following (recommended) works make substantial use of specific advertisements which illustrate or support their arguments: Roland Barthes (1972) *Mythologies* London, Jonathan Cape; Williamson (1978); Goffman (1979); Marchand (1985); Leiss *et al.* (1990); Lears (1994).

following assertions: the advertising process has been mystified in Marxist accounts of the production of culture; advertising, in the form of advertisements, has become fetishised by semiologists; the 'codes' of advertising have been utterly mystified in postmodern accounts; ethnographic research has under-estimated the importance of creative processes in the production of advertising; and, cultural studies, even in recognising the existence of an advertising industry, actually grants inordinate agency to creative workers (as it does habitually to consumers in general).

My own approach initially draws on Richard Johnson's 'circuit of culture' (Johnson 1986/87), which provides a general model of the circulation of meanings and values from production through consumption, and back again. It allows us to consider the role of creative, cultural workers in this process, as they draw on and re-interpret codified symbols (such as those to be found in advertising) - although it should be added that Johnson does not apply his model to this context. Extending this line of reasoning, I draw on Leiss, Kline & Jhally's 'bridge' (Leiss *et al.* 1990), which allows us to elaborate on Johnson's schematic. It specifically identifies the advertising industry, in particular, as a vital intermediate site between production and consumption.

Treating advertising agencies as workplaces in Chapter Two, I assert that we must develop a sustained understanding of creative workers and creative departments if we are to properly theorise advertising - and better understand the shortcomings (and opportunities) of those theoretical arguments taken to task in the first chapter. In particular, I make several key claims, as follows. It is not enough to dismiss advertising as one more element in a monopolistic or manipulative 'culture industry', or as an irredeemably stigmatised occupation involving 'dirty work'. Rather, advertising creatives can be thought of as members of a 'class fraction', collectively described as 'cultural intermediaries', whose otherwise consistent orientation to work (career progression; status and power) is tempered by the uncertainties, volatility, and crises of their calling. These so-called intermediaries

(including ad creatives) can be understood as a 'taste culture', that is, a group primarily defined through its idiosyncratic consumption of certain goods (ad creatives are unique members of this group since their own values and tastes find direct public expression). Furthermore, existing ethnographies provide confirmation of some of the most enduring suppositions about agency life, including the habitual friction which exists between bureaucrats and creatives, and the somewhat ambiguous relationship that creatives have with their ultimate audience. However, they are of limited use, since, depending on the project in hand, the findings of one study contradict the assertions of another).

Situated within the context of these findings, a brief case study reveals some consistent themes in the attitudes and expectations of five senior creatives, which generally correspond with previous findings: a distrust or wariness about the use of research to evaluate their ideas; the liberal use of their experiences as consumers in order to generate new ideas; and, the importance of peer approval (strictly within the creative 'community') in order to sustain career progression. It would appear that the life-force of advertising - at least for creatives - is new or big ideas, clearly expressed; their conceptual strength outweighs rather more peripheral concerns about their presentation; indeed, it is generally held that the best ideas require the least amount of expenditure (i.e. effort *and* money) to work well.

In Chapter 3 I examine advertising as a popular cultural phenomenon, focusing on 30 films about advertising for their depiction of the agency world, and the stories they relate about the tensions and dilemmas of creatives. This analysis reveals: a remarkably coherent and sustained popular fascination with the advertising process; a lucid development in the portrayal of the advertising process and the roles involved, which parallels the evolution of the industry itself - and the public's growing awareness of it; the iteration of concerns about the effects of the media on the public (whether banal sponsored radio soap operas, or manipulative/deceptive ads, etc.) - indeed, these changing historical motifs attest to the way in which popular cinema addresses contemporary popular concerns; and, the expression

and exploration of some major crises of creative conscience which, given ad creatives' pivotal role, are suggestive of uncertainty and anxiety as pervasive themes in the culture of consumption.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I attempt a synthesis and integration of these two perspectives on advertising, which are largely informed by the interview and film case studies, especially the latter. Within this context, I make the following assertions: we must understand ad creatives (and by extension the intermediaries) as a combined class fraction/taste culture which actually constitutes advertising's most privileged audience; the short circuit attests to the speed with which these 'vanguard' consumers adopt or reject certain values or meanings, only to re-incorporate them into new media products (even as older symbolic codes are still being taken up more generally). Additionally, the process of promotion is 'cracked open' for scrutiny in the movies - often quite critically - and this can be seen as analogous to the laying bare of the culture of consumption's internal workings. (In this sense, the resolution of the film narratives not only offers a way to think about the potential for personal salvation or emancipation, but also the possibilities for the future of the consumer culture itself.) Either way, the public's enduring fascination with the business behind the advertisements is confirmed; furthermore, it is debatable whether this serves to demystify and even disarm advertising - or to further mythologise it.

In the concluding arguments, we are reminded that the creative commitment to an emotional connection with the audience is antithetical to economic or rationalised approaches to the understanding of the advertising process, which makes the investigation of these themes all the more urgent. Far from being recognised as a core function of the advertising process, creativity is habitually marginalised as an anomalous contributory factor.

The actual moment of invention is ever-present, but barely acknowledged in any of the accounts presented in the thesis. As a precursor to a more focused investigation, the boundaries of this act are identified through a close re-reading of some of the evidence

already discussed - in particular the interviews and ethnographies. Understanding the creative process (whether in the process of making advertisements or even films) can only help us demystify and defetishise advertising - and any other promotional activity for that matter. Some of the more recent literature on film is instructive in this respect.

Attention is also drawn to some emergent studies (particularly those of Angela McRobbie and Paul du Gay) which have begun the important task of turning attention back to the workplace. This has been achieved in light of, rather than despite, recent debates over the potential agency or sovereignty of the consuming individual.

In summary, this thesis can perhaps be seen as a corrective project which seeks to counter the distortions produced by a number of key frames of analysis. My over-arching conclusions assert that advertising, and popular accounts of its mythos (for example, in films) recognize - at least *implicitly* - the importance of creativity as a dynamic force in capitalist endeavour. Furthermore, ever-accelerating cycles of capital, with their emergent features of accumulation and concentration, are treated as problematic phenomena, due, in significant part, to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of creative labour.

Chapter One

The Fetishism of Advertising

the envelopment of the individual by promotion must be grasped from both sides of the promotional sign. It is not enough to look at this question only from the side of reception, that is to look at subjects only as readers/listeners addressed by a certain kind of speech. We must also take account of the way in which the contemporary subject has become implicated in promotional culture as a writer/performer of its texts.

Andrew Wernick (1991:192)

Introduction

At the core of most arguments about the character of contemporary life are some basic and yet profound assumptions about the moral or ethical dimensions of production and consumption. It is a truism to suggest that the study of production in the social sciences and humanities is unfashionable; by contrast, its correlate, consumption, is a realm of intense debate in which the personally expressive dimension of social life is indeed a 'popular' concept. Conversely, consumption studies are treated as an exercise in bad taste by those unfashionable souls who persist in seeing the most fruitful analysis emerging from an understanding of our relationship to the sphere of work. The style metaphor used here is intentional, if overstated: the task of understanding production is often characterised - stereotypically - as a stuffy or high-minded project, whereas some analyses of consumption stand accused of being decidedly trivial.

As might be expected, given its inextricable links to both of these 'spheres', advertising has been the target of both elitist attacks and well-intentioned critiques. More specifically, Richard Pollay has noted that "[m]ost of the criticism of advertising comes from those who focus on advertising's social role, whereas most of its defense comes from those who emphasize its economic functions" (1986:19). Whereas the *institution* of advertising and,

more generally, the "mass media of communications" was once held to be a 'blindspot' in Marxist studies¹, today, this could hardly be further from the truth. In the subsequent rush, it was perhaps unavoidable that advertising would become entangled in any number of evaluative debates over the true nature of contemporary capitalist endeavour. For example, Andrew Wernick has pointed out the not-uncommon tendency to "generate a picture of advertising as the cultural arm of a totally administered society". However, he qualifies this by adding that "[s]uch analysis falters...when it comes to demonstrating, whether in the case of selling soap or selling politicians...that it actually works" (1991:188).

Here, then, 'advertising' has less to do with the actual buying of goods - whether as an informational or emotional method of persuasion - than as a "privileged discourse for the circulation of messages and social cues about the interplay between persons and objects" (Leiss *et al.* 1990:50). In adopting Leiss *et al.*'s conceptualization, this discussion is oriented to advertising as a conveyor, reflector or amplifier of changing personal, social, and cultural values, rather than as an instrumental market mechanism. It is also important to note that although the term 'advertising' has often been used interchangeably with 'advertisements', the distinction between the two is crucial in the context of this thesis. Here, 'advertising' is deemed to include the 'flesh-and-blood' processes involved 'behind the scenes', constrained by the organizational elements *within* advertising agencies, and the relationship between agencies and client companies (all of which culminates in the production of *advertisements*).

Since advertising, as my own realm of inquiry, is implicated in debates on both sides of the divide, a selective review of some of the theoretical tensions outlined above will serve to contextualise the issues addressed in this thesis .

¹Dallas Smythe (1977) 'Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism' Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory 1(3), pp.1-27.

Critical Departures

The recent shift to consumption, and consumer-oriented, studies has also heralded the breakdown of older arguments about production, including many of their associated projections about its direst consequences. Whether these have actually collapsed under the veritable weight of new evidence, or simply been rendered dowdy by more fashionable concerns, remains to be seen. Regardless, the perceived threat of a 'totally administered society' formed much of the impetus for a number of critiques which clearly sensed little of worth emerging from the societal changes of the post-war period, particularly in North America.

The Culture Industry

In the midst of the political and military upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s, two European dissidents set out to understand and explain the transformative American culture in which they had found refuge. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's seminal essay entitled 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (1973) is notable for its abiding sense of pessimism. The writers shudder at the prospect of a 'mass' society of 'conventions', 'routine', and 'sameness' in which "[e]ven the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system" (1973:120).

Their conception of contemporary society was predicated on the assumption that a certain (high) cultural integrity had been placed under serious threat. Blame clearly lay with the culture *industry*, which, affected by similar overtones of sameness and exploitation as other more familiar sites of mass production, had developed strategies of manipulation and domination: "Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce" (*ibid*:121).

What made the situation all the more intolerable was that the 'masses' appeared to enjoy the 'rubbish' produced by the culture industry with untrammelled abandon. The problem therefore lay with *them*: "The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1973:121) - to the degree that 'false consciousness' was now endemic. The ultimate tragedy for critics in this tradition is that "[i]n a society with its social fabric shredded, the models of love and friendship are most conspicuous among the illusory propaganda of the consumer industries" (Ewen & Ewen 1992:50), and human love "is downgraded to romance" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1973:144).

It should be noted that these kinds of sentiments have not been the sole preserve of the political Left. Indeed, Daniel Bell, described by Jurgen Habermas as "the most brilliant of the American neoconservatives"², has been deeply concerned about the danger posed by a "generally hedonistic, spendthrift and throw-away ethic" (Lee 1993:106). Capitalism, as a long-established economic system, had "always been fuelled by certain ascetic principles of self-denial" (*ibid*), which ensured that there was constant and sufficient re-investment in mass production. However, in light of the characteristically excessive tendencies of mass *consumption*, the perpetuation of investment might ultimately be insufficient to ensure capital's stability.

In these conceptions, advertising often simply generates - and then panders to - 'false needs', which leads us "to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1973:5). Consistent with this line of argument, Judith Williamson has recently suggested that: "The need for relationship and human meaning appropriated by advertising is one that, if only it was not diverted, could radically change the society we live in" (1978:14).

²Jurgen Habermas (1983) 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project' in Hal Foster (ed.) The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture Port Townsend WA, Bay Press, pp.3-15.

Advertising and Manipulation

Some of the most widely-received books published in the early post-war period can be seen as historically situated attempts to account for the particular developments and concerns of an evolving culture of consumption, at the mercy of insidious strategies of production. Inevitably, it must be acknowledged that some of the older works cited here have perhaps lost much of their resonance/relevance, and yet their collective *strength* - which is vital in this context - is that they are wholly reflective of the times in which they were conceived. For example, to read David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (originally published in 1950) is to acquaint oneself with an account of "contemporary, highly industrialized, and bureaucratic America" (1964:19) (which, as we shall see, bears comparison with the America of movies such as *The Hucksters* (1947 US) and *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit* (1956 US) - in fact, a clear link can be made between the production of films about advertising over time and widely-read sociological concerns expressed in similar historical periods).

In his 'study of the changing American character', Riesman identifies three social archetypes which, once defined, allow him to construct a detailed account of transitional, yet structured, conformity. Noting in advance the pitfalls of classification and the contingency of the generalizations they suggest, he begins with the 'relatively unchanging' social order of the nineteenth century. Prior to industrialization, America was a heavily agrarian country, and the 'tradition-directed' individual was a product of a culture which provided "ritual, routine, and religion to occupy and to orient everyone" (1964:11). (According to Mills, in the 1850s a full "three-fourths of the people were farmers" (1956:xiv).)

The third, and currently dominant type is the product of a transitional phase Riesman calls 'inner-direction'. Likened to Weber's Protestant ethic (1964:18), this emerged through a greatly changing society "characterized by increased personal mobility, by a rapid

accumulation of capital (teamed with devastating technological shifts), and by an almost constant *expansion*: intensive expansion in the production of goods and people, and extensive expansion in exploration, colonization, and imperialism" (*ibid*:14).

As an archetype, these people were less dependent on the 'strict and self-evident' motivations of the tradition-directed, but were nevertheless socialized toward "inescapably destined goals" (Riesman 1964:15). This compares favourably with other popular academic accounts such as Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* (1976) which describes the effects of industrialization, the migration of workers to the new centres of production, and the breakdown of traditional or extended families. The emergence of a culture predicated on consumption underlies both Ewen's and Riesman's arguments; whereas the former bemoans the subjugation of the working classes under a consumerist hegemonic regime, the latter describes the swelling of the middle class ranks, wherein "[p]eople who are literate, educated, and provided with the necessities of life...turn increasingly to the 'tertiary' economic realm" (1964:20). Both authors cite the promotional imperatives of this new society as a primary influence; Ewen perhaps overstates the role of advertising, whereas Riesman claims, less specifically, that "relations with the outer world and with oneself are mediated by the flow of mass communication". The 'novelty of literacy' had replaced the oral tradition and both were subsumed by the mass media: "children begin their training as consumers at an increasingly young age" (1964:96).

J. K. Galbraith found much to lament in his economic study of *The Affluent Society* (1958). Concerning himself with the "great and quite unprecedented affluence" of the Western world, and the U.S. in particular, he also noted that "advertising and salesmanship...have become among our most important and talented professions" (1958:1-2). In this account, the promotional effervescence of contemporary society merely hides an essential lack of vision: "men of all social disciplines and all political faiths seek the comfortable and the accepted;...the bland lead the bland" (*ibid*:5). For Jackson Lears, "[i]n their very

inoffensiveness and desire to fit in, suburban Americans seemed to critics to embody our own national version of the 'self-policing state' - the society that had sailed into a calm, dead-level ocean of conformity" (Lears 1994:252). (Simultaneously, we find the necessary heroes of the movies swimming against a tide of gray flannel, where their only means of differentiation from the 'masses' is to involve themselves in the very mechanisms concerned with the invention of superficial difference.)

C.Wright Mills' *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1956) was published around the time that *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit* was released. The massive popularity of film-going ("[e]ighteen thousand movie houses...visited by ninety million people each week" (Mills 1956:253) goes some way to explaining the promotional and theatrical metaphors which litter his account of this "new cast of actors, performing the major routines of twentieth-century society" (*ibid*:ix). "What must be grasped", he maintains, "is the picture of society as a great salesroom, an enormous file, an incorporated brain, a new universe of management and manipulation" (*ibid*:xv). Mills is convinced that the key to understanding society lies with the study of this emergent class-fraction and its 'lower middle class' correlate - which, through its 'fascinated receptivity', "form[s] an eager market for the gross output" of the mass media (*ibid*:339).

The Huxleyian overtones of suffocating conformity one senses in these critiques gradually gave way to an overtly Orwell-tainted vision of sinister media manipulation. For many this began in 1957 with the sensationalized popular sociology of Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* , which marked the beginning of a series of exposés (including *The Pyramid Climbers* (1962): 'A penetrating new look at today's corporation man and his perilous climb to the executive suite...'). According to Lears, Packard "captured and catalyzed popular anxieties" in his best-selling book, which "was a blend of plainspoken outrage at fraud and republican concern about mysterious conspiracies, updated to dramatize postwar preoccupations about mass manipulation" (1994:255).

Television (which had initially crept into living rooms such as that belonging to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, beguiling his children in the process) initiated a torrent of concerns over the unmitigated (and unknown) persuasive powers of the media. (In the film, even the hero's boss tells him to "kick it in if it comes between you and your children".) At this time the new medium clearly presented an unchecked threat to the domestic sphere, rather than an unprecedented promotional opportunity. Even as marketing men sought new opportunities they shared the concerns of society at large regarding such alien threats - barely recognized as 'new media'.

The alarmist overtones of this period reached new, scandalized heights in Wilson Bryan Key's two books *Subliminal Seduction* (1974) and *Media Sexploitation* (1977), the former of which included an introduction by Marshall McLuhan. For Key many advertising images contained hidden, and highly suggestive, words, phrases, and images designed to have a libidinal appeal - below the level of immediate consciousness. As Stephen Fox (1984:318) has noted, while these claims were unresearched - and often plain 'silly' - they clearly captured the public's imagination, and its skepticism about the true intentions of powerful advertisers.

All of these dire prognostications represent one side of a debate which can very roughly be characterized as a conflict between those who ascribe a structural or determining role to the 'mass' media - and see nothing good coming of it - and those who ultimately place their faith in the capacity of society's members to be fully cognizant of their chameleon-like environment, and to choose their destiny accordingly. (Advertising inevitably figures large in these skirmishes because, as a 'discourse through and about objects' (Leiss *et al.* 1990), it exists to promise change for the better, albeit through the buying of goods or services.)

A more grounded - and less reactionary - critical response has been to focus on the nature of the commodity rather than the sorry plight of the masses, cast as pawns at the mercy of the symbolic power of industrial-strength advertising. Indeed, this more sophisticated

approach demands that attention be turned to the way in which meanings are attached to commodities. This might also be described as an mode of thought which relies less on liberal notions of decency or moral imperative, than on the more profound issue of human emancipation.

Marxism & Production Studies

The industrial revolution heralded the spectacle of a world being irrevocably reshaped by the processes of mass production. For an astute observer like Marx, this new realm of factories and waged labour was of political interest, not because of the possibilities it offered in the use of a startling array of products by increasingly urban populations, but because of the implications of a specifically *capitalist* form of production for those who provided their labour in its name. His observations and arguments in the first volume of *Capital*, therefore, have less to do with the satisfaction of 'human wants' - "whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy" - than with the nature of the commodity itself. His seminal call to action begins thus: "[t]he wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'....Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity"³.

Consistent with this approach, Sut Jhally has argued that

in non-market societies there is a unity between people and goods, but in capitalism there is a separation between object and producer. The world of goods in industrial society offers no meaning, its meaning having been 'emptied' out of them. The function of advertising is to refill the emptied commodity with meaning. Indeed the meaning of advertising would make no sense if objects already had an established meaning (Jhally 1989:221, also quoted in Lee 1993:17).

The 'illusory' or 'mysterious' quality of this process resides in the fact that it "disguises the essential social reality of the production of commodities and makes it generally impossible

³Quoted in McLellan (1988:421). See David McLellan, ed. (1988) Karl Marx: Selected Writings Oxford, Oxford University Press. Of all Marx's writings, only one of the four planned volumes of Capital was ever completed and published by him.

to penetrate down beneath this appearance and to identify the real conditions and social relations from which the commodity emerges" (Lee 1993:14).

The Marxian suspicion concerning this hidden or erased dimension - "the night-time of the commodity" (*ibid*:15) in which the worker is 'alienated', or distanced from the fruits of his or her labour - finds a correlate in the treatment of advertising itself as an object of enquiry. Indeed, a pivotal assertion of this thesis is that the work of creating meaning to 'refill' the commodity is both under-reported, and *vital* to our understanding of advertising, our relation to commodities themselves, and, ultimately, to the social and cultural environment in which we live and work.

Nevertheless, the critical frame within which Jhally and Lee conduct their analysis is actually very useful since it allows us to consider the importance of the sphere of production; not only as a site of increasingly sophisticated industrial endeavour, but, in this thesis, as a drastically under-theorized locus for the production of value-laden messages⁴, attached, in a seemingly arbitrary fashion, to commodities. Moreover, theirs is an analysis which recognizes the intimate link between culture and capital; the symbolic and the economic. Both realms are deemed to be "symbiotically intertwined in the new 'communication age' of advanced capitalism" (Jhally 1989:viii).

Marx's own analysis is of limited currency, mainly because of changes in the nature of contemporary capital which he did not foresee. These include the drawing of the working classes into the expansionary economics of capital and the vastly increased significance of consumption; factors which are intimately related to one another⁵. This is sometimes expressed in the eclipse of the 'use-value' of the commodity - the 'symbolic constitution of utility' (Jhally 1989:52) - by 'exchange-value', which is understood here as referring to the

⁴Studies of the way in which the news or entertainment (such as sports coverage) are constructed are not uncommon. However, my implicit assertion here is that advertising, as a strategic and conscious attempt to persuade, constitutes a unique case.

⁵See Ewen (1976).

qualitative (rather than quantitative) or expressive capacity of the commodity. In this respect, Lee notes that

[a]s more of our needs and their satisfactions are inevitably drawn into the market mechanism, and as more and more areas of our lives are touched by the market, then the more autonomous, self-governing and suprahuman appears to be the dynamic movement of commodities and their exchange-values. As we daily confront these commodities and their imagery, in our shops, homes and streets, on our television screens, and in our magazines and newspapers, then the more magical their transubstantiation into values and meanings appears to be. Under such conditions of saturated exposure, the commodity truly seems to deny any basis in social labour, and the values and meanings which are attached to it have, it would seem, been decided upon by mysterious laws decreed by unseen gods (Lee 1993:16).

This otherwise illuminating passage ends with a reference to an invisible and omnipotent agent; an agent recognized, in the context of this thesis (and somewhat unremarkable for it), as the advertising creative. Regardless, Lee persists in constructing the notion of a magical or mystical force when he credits "the highly aestheticised and seductive imagery and packaging of advertising and commercial product design", with having shifted the appeal of commodities from "the satisfaction of corporeal needs" to "little other than non-material desires and ideological fantasies" (*ibid*:19). The invocation of such a super-natural force is needed to account for the fact that the "cultural meanings of goods...have in fact become malleable, free-floating and symbolic illusions" (*ibid*). My suggestion is that an acknowledgement, and understanding, of the production of advertising *as a social process* would help to mitigate such scholarly hyperbole; a common tendency to fetishize advertising. Jhally suggests that "to make a fetish out of something is to invest it with powers it does not have in itself" (1989:28); here, too, the ad is deemed to incorporate mystical powers, and yet this is a quality that we might be less inclined to ascribe to it if we were able to recognize, and account for, the processes and individuals involved in its construction.

Meanwhile, the explosion in intellectual debate about society as an 'unknowable' or semantically fluid environment is to some extent a function of the eruption of social life as a

dazzling cornucopia of meanings lacking fixity - and the exponential increase in the capacity of commodities to carry them - super-charged by advertising, design, or the media more generally. As Featherstone notes, commodities "become free to take on a wide range of cultural associations and illusions. Advertising in particular is able to exploit this and attach images of romance, exotica, desire, beauty, fulfillment, communality, scientific progress and the good life to mundane consumer goods such as soap, washing machines, motor cars and alcoholic drinks" (1991:14). As Raymond Williams noted a decade earlier, "[y]ou do not only buy an object: you buy social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment" (1980:189). In Featherstone's conception, too, 'advertising' (i.e. advertisements) now displays a largely inexplicable capacity simply to glue meanings onto commodities. What is clearly needed at this stage is a way of understanding the advertising process that avoids these obfuscating overtones *and* the unearthly pretensions ascribed by Lee and others.

Culturalist Responses

The Aestheticization and Style of Everyday Life

There is ample evidence to suggest that contemporary culture is increasingly image-based. Featherstone refers to a post-modern environment predicated on the "constant reworking of desires through images" (1991:68), and it is this activity which reverberates through both the media and everyday life. At the extreme, a theorist such as Baudrillard might claim that the panoply of signs and images is so pervasive as to have ultimately effaced what we understand to be the 'real'. His poeticized rhetoric, while appealing to those who seek confirmation that everything is indeed 'undecidable', provides little in the way of pragmatic sustenance:

This unarticulated, instantaneous form, without a past, without a future, without the possibility of metamorphosis, has power over all the others. All current forms of activity tend toward advertising and most exhaust themselves therein....A sociality everywhere present, an absolute sociality finally realized

in absolute advertising - that is to say, also totally dissolved, a vestige of sociality hallucinated on all the walls in a simplified form of a demand of the social that is immediately met by the echo of advertising. The social as script, whose bewildered audience we are (1994:87-88).

As with Lee's occult overtones, my suggestion here, too, is that this constant and 'bewildering' out-pouring would be better understood as socially-produced (even *manufactured*) rather than as the baffling consequence of some impenetrable new epoch.

What all these phenomena have in common is an origin in creative expression; put simply, every image, every ad, can be traced back - at least schematically - to consciously-directed human activity. If we can set aside these oblique ruminations - whether as a certain fetishization of the sign in post-modernist thinking, or of the advertisement and advertising more generally by modernists - then we should be able to create a space in which to conceive of a critical theory of commercial creativity. In such a frame, advertising (and product design; package design; style/fashion journalism; and many more besides⁶) would be understood as relying on *artistic* labour (which, strictly speaking, is neither clerical nor manual, white nor blue collar).

*The Triumph of Code and Culture I:
Semiotics and Content Analysis*

*We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that
is speaking*

Walden
H. D. Thoreau (1854)

Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* (1978) is perhaps the best known and most referenced work on the signifying practices embedded in advertising. As Mica Nava has noted (Nava: forthcoming), this semiological approach led Williamson, perhaps unsurprisingly, to declare that "[o]bviously people invent and produce adverts, but apart

⁶See Chapter Four for a more detailed list.

from the fact that they are unknown and faceless, the ad in any case does not claim to speak for them, it is not their speech" (1978:14). Williamson's view is consistent with that of Roland Barthes who, as a leading semiotician, warned against any attempt to account for the supposed intentions of the producers (authors) of any message (text) - or even the actual readings of their audience. He asserted that "to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation" (1977:160). As Leiss *et al.* explain: "From the outset, semiologists have concentrated on relationships among the parts of a message or communication system, for, they contend, it is only through the interaction of component parts that meaning is formed" (1990:198). It is surely somewhat ironic, therefore, that in wrestling the text away from its author, Barthes reverted not to the polysemous potentialities to be found in the text's *public* reception, but in the complex and skilled interpretations available to the trained semiotician through this 'science of signs'. As Richard Johnson has mused, "[i]n these and other semiological endeavours do we mainly hear the busy whirl of self-generating intellectual systems rapidly slipping out of control?" (1986/87:60).

Perhaps it is inevitable that advertisements should prove to be so popular with those who saw their task as discerning, and then breaking, the codes embedded in cultural artifacts. It is far easier to announce the 'death of the author' in the context of a massively visible promotional project which is, at the same time, somewhat unique for its lack of discernible authorship. As Williamson herself has noted: "There is a space, a gap left where the speaker should be" (1978:13); it is as though the intellectual has stepped into this space to speak 'on behalf of' the ad - in place of its absent creator.

Films, books, TV shows, and even CD covers are often clearly linked to their originators. Outside the walls of the ad agencies, on the other hand, advertisements are necessarily anonymous creations. As Williamson rightly explains, "one of the peculiar features of advertising is that we are drawn in to fill the gap" (*ibid*); and here, there is work to be done:

a 'transference' which "requires our active participation" (Leiss *et al.* 1990:202). Sometimes this 'work' is easy, for, *in fact*, it depends not on some tricky confluence of signs, but on the ingenuity of the creator. From the point of view of copywriters and art directors, at least, a lack of invention might simply lead to an unimaginative ad - a clichéd word-play, a lousy joke, or a 'mad pun'.

All this is not to suggest that semiotics has no value in the study of advertising, but that one of its foundational assumptions limits the degree of certainty with which we can apply it, or the confidence we can have in universalising its findings. Put bluntly, the certainty of many semiological assertions about advertising messages might be less assured if their creators were on hand during such analyses. Indeed, a *strong* semiotic code might just as well be understood as an *accomplished* ad; the work of a skilled creative mind. Conversely, an ad concept written and even disowned by a creative team, might then present itself as a suitably pedestrian code for a novice semiotician to break; what the semiotician ends up 'cracking' is not merely a simple code but a feeble joke.

More recent uses of semiotics in the study of advertising, in recognizing its limitations, have broken this received orthodoxy. An example of this is the development of a method for ad analysis which combines semiotics with content analysis (see Leiss *et al.* 1990). This then provides a more accessible foothold for those attempting to follow or repeat the work. However, at one extreme, the danger remains that, as Don Slater has suggested, "[s]uch theories are then used to ignore the actual social practice of advertising, implying instead that the ideological structure of language itself can account for the specific character of advertisements" (1989:122). At the other extreme, such theorists "tend to derive an 'account' of readership, in fact, from the critic's own textual readings" (Johnson 1986/87:63).

*The Triumph of Code and Culture II:
Ethnographic Research; Cultural Studies*

Although ethnographic and culturalist approaches implicitly treat advertising as a process, in *practice* they often merely concern themselves with its end result, which is perhaps unsurprising since this is 'advertising' at its most visible and, more importantly, most accessible. In discussing his ethnographic research on "*the* advertising agency" (emphasis added), Don Slater reveals that his main task was to ascertain "what formulation of advertising's power is operative in the actual production of advertisements" (1989:122). He concludes that "[w]hereas the advertising agent *par excellence* is generally thought to be the 'creative person', the real centres of power in most agencies are the account handlers" (1989:127). Crucially, he chose to study "seven *large* agencies, focusing on advertising as a commercial, rather than a communicative operation, and thus on its relation to everyday business practice" (1989:122, emphasis added).

This can be usefully contrasted with the approach of Mica Nava (forthcoming) who wants to rescue advertising from its 'incrimination' and construction "as the iconographic signifier of multinational capitalism". As a theorist who has recently argued that young people consume advertising as art (Nava 1992), she claims that, in utter contradiction to Slater, "even prior to the present restructuring of the industry...creative departments operated relatively independently within the larger companies" (Nava: forthcoming).

Thus it would appear that the institution of advertising, when occasionally addressed in these contexts, is portrayed in a manner which serves to confirm the objectives of the theorist concerned, since Slater and Nava base their arguments on an erroneous assumption: although Slater's comments are clearly based on substantial primary research - whereas Nava is apparently reliant on very few secondary sources - both writers assume that the credence of their assertions is enhanced by their analysis of 'large(r)' agencies.

However, what is rarely acknowledged - or even perceived in theoretical accounts - is the diversity of cultures which exist within advertising agencies of varying sizes.

Whereas many agencies may indeed be very large, highly bureaucratized, and dependent for much of their income on the patronage of similarly trans-national companies (requiring 'solid' or even formulaic creative executions as a highly ordered and integrated component in much larger marketing plans), others may be small (and by inference, young), predatory, and differentiated by outlandish or controversial creative work. As one of the interviewees discussed later notes, the bigger the agency, the more important the 'bottom line' becomes. In contrast, the "smaller agencies that have great creative reputations" are "not so much interested in the long term, but in the 'right now': 'I want the best creative I can get right now' " (E)⁷ - and this from the Chief Creative Officer of one of the largest international agencies in the world. It clearly makes little sense to talk of '*the* agency', as does Slater (1985, 1989), or '*the* advertising man', as does Ian Lewis⁸ (1964). There also appears to be little evidence to support Nava's claim regarding the 'relative autonomy' of creative departments in 'larger' agencies.

Nava and Schudson are notable for their shared acknowledgment that there is at least *some* significance in the role of art directors and copywriters. Nava has recently noted that "creative decisions are based on experience and intuition, not on anything as grand as a 'science' of commodity signs" (Nava: forthcoming). Schudson makes a similar point in *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion*: "[i]deas for copy or art do not derive from a philosophy. Creative workers tend to say that a good, intuitive understanding of human nature is what matters most." He goes on to say: "[a] creative director told me, 'The best people I know are intuition people. A feeling for other people, an ability to empathize, that's what matters'" (1993:85).

⁷The interviewees' responses discussed in Chapter Two are encoded to provide anonymity; further details may be provided on request.

⁸Ian Lewis is a pseudonym for Joseph Bensman; see Bensman (1967).

Although Schudson goes on to claim that the only recognizable source of influence for art directors and copywriters is the 'culture of advertising' - mainly other agencies' work - this is clearly insufficient to account for the multitude and diversity of ideas generated. Besides, an industry hermetically sealed off from its audience would soon become stale, if not irrelevant. In suggesting that ad creatives constitute a very distinct class and consumer 'fraction', I maintain that it is their considerable appetite for all that is new in film, TV, radio, magazines, products, and services, which makes them expert participants in the consumer culture. This is part and parcel of the 'intuition' with which they have been credited by Nava and Schudson.

On the whole, however, sociological analysis has been slim, and Hirschman (1989) suggests two plausible reasons for this when she says that "[t]his is perhaps because the artistic elements of advertising are viewed as so commercialized as to preclude serious study as an aesthetic medium, or because the advertising creation and production process is viewed as too derivative of client ideology to merit consideration as a forum for independent expression" (1989:43). The latter suggestion clearly overstates the case, but the spirit of Hirschman's objections, at least, are shared in this thesis.

Towards a Remedy

Many of the points so far discussed serve to illustrate my general discomfort with the way in which advertising has been understood, while maintaining that it is still of central importance in the broader shift towards a consumer culture (which also marks a watershed, if not the effacement, of modernity). It has been suggested, via Lee and Jhally, that Marx's notion of the fetishism of commodities is also a very useful way to conceive of the cumulative intellectual treatment of advertising to date. The inference that advertising can be seen as a commodity should not come as much of a surprise; after all, intangible 'products' such as information have long been recognized as commodities; advertising also carries a

surfeit of meaning into the realm of consumption; and, as we have seen, it is equally capable of being incriminated for inordinate powers which it does not actually possess. Here, however, there is an important distinction to be made: whereas the fetishized *commodity's* seductive capacity is realized through consumption, the fetishized *ad* (whether advertising or advertisement) primarily causes havoc in the intellectual arena.

In some senses then, the task of this thesis is to provide an alternative; to suggest ways in which we might counter a certain unhelpful tendency in our thinking about contemporary western culture. In order to do this, I draw on two conceptual models, which are unlikely, in and of themselves, to provide anything so grand as a new theoretical framework; however, in combination, they suggest ways in which the shortcomings so far discussed might be remedied.

Advertising: The Bridge

Leiss *et al.* (1990) offer the analogy of a bridge to explain the integral importance of advertising to both the spheres of production *and* consumption. They note that their approach is somewhat novel, since it

places much greater emphasis than others on the close interconnections among advertising, the goods-producing sector, and media, and especially on advertising's connective or bridging function in relation to production and media. The advertising industry, led by its agencies, transferred knowledge about the media to producers, knowledge about audiences to media, and knowledge about consumers and how to reach them more effectively with marketing campaigns back and forth between producers and the media (1990:152)

The model is useful to my interpretation because it allows us to consider views 'from the bridge'; for example, to understand advertising as both the final stage of production *and* a catalytic moment heralding consumption. In the former sense, the 'industry' of advertising carries many of the connotations of a production environment, in which labour is utilized to generate knowledge and to create advertisements. Thus issues of work and class can also be thought about in a legitimate context which does not rely on consideration of the

reception, interpretation or 'use' of the advertising 'product'. If the bridge itself is an unusual notion, then its constitution as a structure made of *labour* - of flesh-and-blood - is even more rare. This is, however, essential to the arguments presented in this thesis. The instrumental or *institutional* sense is by far the more familiar version, and generally concerns the cultural cues and meanings carried in advertising messages themselves, whereas a pointedly humanist perspective demands that we acknowledge the existence of social processes.

Leiss *et al.* warn against viewing advertising "as primarily an extension of the industrial process of manufacture and distribution, and minimiz[ing] its own interpretation of and contribution to mediated communication and its impact on modern popular culture" (1990:152). For them, the danger is that "we run the risk of ignoring much of what happened in the twentieth century - the novel use of visuals, dialogue, storytelling, film demonstration, characters, persuasive design, and marketing strategy" (*ibid*). The 'flesh-and-blood' formulation has therefore been developed here in an advised fashion: the purpose is not to ride rough-shod over an accumulation of scholarly achievement which has sought to comprehend increasingly sophisticated advertising messages, but mainly to revisit this production-oriented conception in order to expand on the advantageous perspective it still offers, and to counter its implied theoretical shortcomings.

The Circuit of Culture

Our current discussion of the 'media' seems to suffer from severe theoretical limitations. Newsprint, films, television, public relations tend to be evaluated separately, in terms of their specific technologies, conditions, and possibilities....Hardly anyone seems to be aware of the phenomenon as a whole: the industrialization of the human mind. This is a process which cannot be understood by a mere examination of its machinery

Hans Magnus Enzensberger⁹

⁹Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1976) Raids and Reconstructions: Essays on Politics, Crime and Culture London, Pluto Press, p.8.

an aggregate of information about producers, channels and consumers which created a field of communication studies without communication.

Hanno Hardt¹⁰

Richard Johnson's 'circuit of culture' is a disappointingly under-exposed model which seeks to attend to the *partiality* of existing epistemologies; that is, as territorial concerns eternally dedicated to reiterating their distinctions - rather than building on their potential commonalities. He describes it as "a circuit of capital and its expanded reproduction *and* a circuit of the production and circulation of subjective forms" (1986/87:47). These two versions are, of course, interdependent, and while the former is adopted directly from Marx, the latter captures the essence of much debate in the fading shadows of his legacy.

The circuit (a modified version of which appears in Appendix 1.) represents four 'moments', and in diagrammatic form these are: production; texts; readings (i.e. consumption); and lived cultures/social relations. (These moments are discussed in detail throughout the thesis.) My assertion here is that Leiss *et al.*'s bridge can be thought of as an elaboration of Johnson's model *specific to advertising*, and across which traffic passes in two directions. Bearing in mind that this bridge is now a flesh-and-blood edifice, meaning is basically 'transported' to the media and the realm of consumption (chiefly in the form of advertisements), and then carried back to the moment of production via the lived experience of advertising creatives. This argument is elaborated in Chapter Four.

In explaining the impetus for his model, Johnson finds fault with the privileging of either the moment of production or the moment of consumption - and yet each has much to be gained from a bridge between the two.

What if existing theories - and the modes of research associated with them - actually express different sides of the same complex process? What if they are all true, but only as far as they go, true for those parts of the process which they have most clearly in view? What if they are all false or incomplete, liable to mislead, in that they are only partial, and therefore cannot grasp the process as a whole? What if attempts to 'stretch' this competence (without modifying the

¹⁰Hanno Hardt (1992) Critical Communication Studies: Communication, history and theory in America London, Routledge, p.xii.

theory) lead to really gross and dangerous (ideological?) conclusions? (Johnson 1986/7:45-46).

Williamson has actually bemoaned the fundamental lack of "any sense of the relationship between the spheres of production and consumption" (1986:229), and only recently has it been noted that "[i]t is necessary to identify cycles of production and consumption because previous accounts have unduly contracted, or telescoped, the processes involved, as they hurry...to get from capitalist production to identity-enhancement" (Warde 1992:18).

There is ample evidence to suggest that an inter-disciplinary armistice is unlikely, since skirmishes continue apace; for example, the recent colloquy in the journal *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (March 1995), in which Nicholas Garnham and Graham Murdock took up the gauntlet on behalf of Political Economy, and Lawrence Grossberg and James Carey stepped up wearing the colours of Cultural Studies. The title of Grossberg's piece was particularly telling: 'Cultural Studies v Political Economy: Is anybody else bored with this debate?'.¹¹

The relevance of such a predicament to this thesis is plain: in attempting to more fully address the issues introduced here, the spheres of consumption and production must somehow be reconciled - and at more than one level. Whether this would constitute a conceptual starting point - or emerge as a *result* of such endeavour - still remains to be seen. Commenting on the 'bifurcated' debate between Grossberg, Garnham, *et al.*, and perhaps adding more of a tone of reproachment for the short-comings of existing *cultural* work, McRobbie argues that

What is needed now is a better, more reliable set of cultural maps. We need to be able to do more than analyse the texts, we need data, graphs, ethnographies, facts and figures....There are in fact many points of intervention and analysis which neither of these approaches has as yet fully explored. The complex appeal of work in the cultural field, the utopian and transformative aspiration which resides alongside what might more typically be understood as individualizing cultural and economic practices, needs to be considered in the context of contemporary historical realities. The so-called aestheticization of

¹¹ 'Colloquy' (1995) *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12(1).

culture has opened up desires for social transformation which can be seen in those forms of work and economic activity which have been too easily dismissed as marginal, merely 'cultural' and politically insignificant (1996:341).

The promise of Johnson's model is that we can travel around the circuit to scrutinize certain moments and, thanks to Leiss *et al.*'s bridge, account for the 'leap' of meaning, often via ad-as-commodity, at various points *en route*. The possible reductionisms of this approach are mitigated by my previous assertion that this is less a theoretical departure than an alternative mode of presentation. As Johnson warns:

It is important to stress that the circuit has not been presented as an adequate account of cultural processes or even of elementary forms. It is not a completed set of abstractions against which every partial approach can be judged. It is not therefore an adequate strategy for the future just to add together the three sets of approaches, using each for its appropriate moment (1986/87:73).

Needless to say, the journey around the circuit is also analogous to the often inconsistent evidence of my own intellectual discoveries. It should also be noted that Johnson's model is used and adapted very much in the spirit in which he offered it: as a fluid intervention which must be modified and re-interpreted where necessary, if it is ultimately to be considered a useful tool.

Johnson chooses to begin his discussion of the various 'moments' in his circuit by focusing on cultural production. This he calls "the making public of private forms" (1986/87:52) and, as such, it is a convenient point at which to join the circuit (and is not intended as a valorization of one particular moment over any other). He notes the "very different political tendencies" of the approaches to be found at this point,

from the theoretical knowledges of advertisers, persons involved in public relations for large organisations, many liberal-pluralist theorists of public communication and the larger part of writings on culture within the marxist and other critical traditions....What unites these diverse works...is that they all take, if not the viewpoint of cultural producers, at least the theoretical standpoint of production (1986/87:53-54).

Johnson's own interests lie in the conditions, means, and actual moment of production, understood as operating under specifically capitalist conditions (1986/87:47).

In sum, the model provides a powerful tool with which to draw together a variety of knowledges. Its only obvious shortcoming is the apparent difficulty with which a historical perspective can be incorporated. However, as the following chapters attempt to show, each 'moment' can actually be investigated as a historical phenomenon; as having a 'temporal dimensionality'. To this end, Chapter Two draws on a very particular sociological heritage, followed by the use of interviews and existing ethnographies, in order to consider a range of perspectives on the 'moment' of production in Johnson's circuit. Chapter Three involves an extensive analysis ('reading') of movies about advertising released over the last fifty years, which together constitute a set of texts on the circuit's consumption side. Finally, Chapter Four draws out some of the accumulated findings for further discussion, and notes the vital drive provided by creativity in production (Chapters Two) and consumption (Chapter Three). The thesis ends with a series of proposals for further enquiry.

Chapter Two

Advertising Production & Private Knowledges: The 'No-Collar' Worker

Most advertising is not the cool creation of skilled professionals, but the confused creation of bad thinkers and artists...[in experiencing ads] we are looking at attempts to express and resolve real human tensions which may be crude but which also involve deep feelings of a personal and social kind.

Williams (1980:190)

Introduction

The following sections concern two particular 'knowledges' which can be said to subscribe to the viewpoint of production: first, the academic and, in particular, the sociological perspective on advertising work; and second, the professional knowledge of senior creatives in advertising. The former section reviews a significant - if sparse - literature on creative occupations, collectively conceived as a 'class fraction', followed by ethnographic approaches, which are treated as an attempt to move, via empirical study, into the political and ideological gap between traditional sociological and business perspectives. The latter involves the exploration of some empirical evidence: a series of interviews recently carried out with the creative directors of several West Coast ad agencies in the U.S., designed to discover contemporary attitudes, processes, and trends. This is supplemented with secondary sources, including articles on, and by, agency personnel. The inference in the empirical research is that creatives can also be understood as a 'taste culture' based on their constitution as consumers. All of the material reviewed and discussed in this chapter should be recognized as part of the 'set of texts' associated with the emergence of advertising as an 'actual product'.

Section One: Sociological Perspectives

advertising offers one of the few remaining inlets for creative activity that is accessible to the 'middle class' artist

Shapiro (1981:42)

The issue of class is an inherent part of sociological concerns which seek to understand the labour process. The contemporary advertising industry is professionalized and bureaucratized. As such it is most accurately classified as a 'white collar' institution. However, the creative occupations, identified as being integral to its successful functioning, operate within the same constraints and yet also display marked inconsistencies with this classification. Some of the skills associated with being a creative are: high levels of job insecurity *as a norm*; a manual element (particularly for art directors); the veneration of 'undisciplined' or anarcho-artistic tendencies; and habitual exclusion and remoteness from clerical, financial, and managerial operations.

In recognition of these aspects (and in order to differentiate the *relative* lack of restraint under which they perform their tasks from the white-collar routines of account handlers, planners, or administrators) creatives might best be termed 'no-collar' workers. This is also a reference to the encouraged informality of their appearance - particularly when compared with long-established standards of business attire. (The usefulness and relevance of these distinctions should soon become clear; it must be stressed that this neologism is not intended to suggest that creative workers can be conceptualized as remotely 'blue-collar'. Their work *does* have residual craft-based overtones, but here the similarity ends: the author recognizes the dangers in romanticizing the exploits of a highly privileged, motivated, and individualistic 'class fraction' earnestly involved in the reproduction of capital.)

Advertising and The Sociology of Work

In the 1960s a number of sociologists in Britain and America turned their attention to the study of the (professional) workplace. As one eminent researcher, Everett Hughes, explained: "Ours is a time of great increase in the number of white-collar (or black-coated) occupations and in the proportion of the labour force in them" (in Tunstall 1964:7). The hypotheses which emerged in response to this demographic upswing often related to the ideological conditions under which the swollen ranks of the middle classes laboured.

More generally, it was the 'two great alternative meanings' of work which informed much of the debate; that is, whether it was "of central importance to...personality development and life fulfillment", or, "little more than a tiresome necessity in acquiring the resources for survival" (Fox in Esland & Salaman 1980:140). Based on this ambivalence, advertising proved particularly attractive - strictly as a subject of research - since it constituted a burgeoning, yet profoundly suspect, occupational pursuit. (Its reputation for being a glamorous, hedonistic environment in which to work had even caught the popular imagination, as a number of movies in the 1950s and 1960s testify.)

Advertising has been described as an 'extreme occupation' by Everett Hughes (in Tunstall 1964), an eminent sociologist known for his concept of 'dirty work' ("which involves its practitioners in major problems of self-justification and defence" Esland & Salaman 1980:ix). Joseph Bensman echoed and expanded on this description, noting that the 'opposite pole' is "highly altruistic, non-profit, low-paying work" (1967:71). The moralizing overtones of this formulation are particularly apt, given that Bensman worked for a number of years in advertising, and after his "flight from Madison Avenue" took up "more dignified work" as a professor of sociology, while continuing his involvement with socially-oriented non-profit organizations.

It is also ironic that in his study of 'opposite poles' (in a book subtitled 'Ideology, Ethics and the Meaning of Work in Profit and Nonprofit Organizations') Bensman saw fit to

conduct his research on advertising under false pretences; his subjects were not even aware they were being interviewed and his findings were published under a false name. We might speculate as to whose interests this was designed to protect, and we might also question the integrity of other researchers who choose to approach their advertising subjects by stealth; Tunstall (1964), and Slater (1985, 1989) are two further examples. It is as if those subjects who are being investigated are somehow less deserving of honest or direct treatment, which would in itself be a tacit claim to moral superiority - not to mention experimental bias - on the part of the researcher.

Peter L. Berger, in writing about the "gambling atmosphere of *the* advertising agency" (1964:228, emphasis added; see also Bensman 1967:22), characterizes the general occupational hazard for its staff as "exact[ing] a considerable psychological toll" (Berger 1964:234). This he attributes to the playing-out of a 'balancing act', best illustrated using Erving Goffman's notions of role distance and 'working the system': the former "is found when individuals consciously play the occupational...role tongue-in-cheek, doing exactly what is expected of them, but, sometimes vehemently, maintaining an inner distance with respect to their role" (*ibid*). Furthermore, this contributes to an ever-present ideological 'distortion'; a constant "discrepancy between the public and the private ideological complexes" (*ibid*:237); between 'chamber-of-commerce rhetoric' and a "concoction of irony and savage 'realism' " (*ibid*:238). How else could one account for the monumental contradictions; the sheer disingenuousness of the advertising profession?

Such righteous observations, though well-intended, are clearly inadequate today. Although the personal frustrations and institutional anxieties which surely pervade advertising are still hugely significant, to subscribe to the collective impression sketched out above is to grossly simplify a complex and competing fabric of aspirations, ethics, and personal moral codes. True, from time to time, advertising men and women have abruptly turned away from their vocation - acts from which we can learn a great deal - but this is also a function of the place

of advertising in society. It is probably true to say that the business is far less stigmatized or even 'marginal' than it once was. The rise of the consumer culture has brought the logic of promotion to centre stage.

The Emergence of the 'New Cultural Intermediaries'

In his thesis on *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), Bell identified a social constituency he referred to as the 'cultural mass', whose members were mainly to be found "in the knowledge and communications industries [and] who, with their families, would number several million persons" (1976:20n). Inner circles within this group were to be further distinguished by their particularly heightened cultural attunement. Bell's inventory included "writers... movie-makers, musicians" and those in "higher education, publishing, magazines, broadcast media, theater, and museums" (*ibid*). He located the emergence of this loose affiliation in the decline of the avant-garde:

Today modernism is exhausted. There is no tension. The creative impulses have gone slack. It has become an empty vessel. The impulse to rebellion has been institutionalized by the 'cultural mass' and its experimental forms have become the syntax and semiotics of advertising and haute couture. (1976:20)

The tone is unmistakably one of indignation; it is this appropriately-named 'mass' which (unfairly) enjoys the status of artists *and* the trappings of bourgeois society: they have "the luxury of 'freer' lifestyles while holding comfortable jobs". Moreover they are "not the creators of culture but the *transmitters*"; they merely "process and influence the reception of serious cultural products" - and only then does this group "produce the popular materials for the wider mass-culture audience" (1976:20n).

This theme of appropriation, bastardization, and dissemination is a recurrent one, and often bears the hallmark of high-handed dismissal. However, as early as the 1920s, advertisers had begun to draw heavily on the "allegedly rebellious impulses of aesthetic 'modernism'" (Lears 1983). For Lears, at least, "[t]he story of the artist in advertising is part of the larger story of the artist in American society" (Lears 1994:262). Indeed he also reminds us that

Michael Schudson has termed advertising the 'official art of twentieth-century capitalist culture' (Lears 1983:22).

Beyond the baldly elitist overtones which pervade Bell's assertions lie some of the seeds of a profoundly influential thesis concerning a potentially epochal shift in the nature of capitalism, which has been recognized and contested by scholars in many disciplines - and of all persuasions. The difficulty in identifying and describing precisely *what* has occurred in the post-war period is reflected in the neologisms which abound.¹ It would appear that the relative legitimacy of the 'cultural mass' is dependent on how the particular formulation of this shift is conceived. For example, a more positive conceptualization is to be found in the work of Mike Featherstone.

Reworking and updating Bell's assertions, Featherstone characterizes the 'new cultural intermediaries'² (a term he adopts from Bourdieu (1984)) as "those in media, design, fashion, advertising, and 'para' intellectual information occupations, whose jobs entail performing services and the production, marketing and dissemination of symbolic goods" (Featherstone 1991:19). It is important to note, however, that whereas for Bell the 'cultural mass' seems to emerge as an *effect* of the "corrosive force" (Featherstone 1991:8) of modernism, for Featherstone, the new cultural intermediaries are rather more significant, if not instrumentally involved. Indeed, "Featherstone argues convincingly that postmodernism is primarily to be understood...as the product of the 'new cultural

¹Ernest Mandel's term 'Late Capitalism' (1975) has since been adopted by Jameson (1991); Claus Offe's notion of 'disorganized capitalism' (1985) reappears in Lash & Urry's (1987) work The End of Organized Capitalism; 'Material Culture': Daniel Miller (1987); 'Consumer Culture' or 'Society': Jean Baudrillard (1970), and thence Mike Featherstone (1991); 'The Society of the Spectacle': Guy Debord (1977); 'Postmodernity': J-F Lyotard (1984), and thence Harvey (1990); 'Promotional Culture' (Wernick 1991). Also via Kellner (1989:3): 'technological society': Ellul; 'post-industrial society': Aaron and Touraine; 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption': Lefebvre.

²This is my preferred term, given the dubious overtones of Bell's nebulous 'cultural mass'. It is also the most commonly-used and inclusive moniker amongst many alternatives (with varying degrees of relevance) - some of which follow: New Petite Bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 1984); the service class, the new (postmodern) class fraction (Lash & Urry 1987); cultural specialists, cultural entrepreneurs, para-intellectuals, symbolic specialists, new tastemakers (all Featherstone (1991)). See also Lee (1993).

intermediaries' and perhaps only secondarily, or at second hand, as a truly popular phenomenon" (McGuigan 1992:216).

Thus the emergence of this class fraction is intimately linked to the periodizing concepts of contemporary cultural theorists. In this context, it would be useful to consider the potential influence and motivations of the new cultural intermediaries in contrast to their modernist forebears. Fredric Jameson's conclusion to his essay on *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* (1983) becomes a question "about the critical value of the newer art" (or 'artistic experimentation', such as advertising, for example):

There is some agreement that the older modernism functioned against its society in ways which are variously described as critical, negative, contestatory, subversive, oppositional and the like. Can anything of the sort be affirmed about postmodernism and its social moment?...there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces - reinforces - the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic. (1983:125)

McGuigan asserts that the intermediaries have emerged from the "radical middle-class youth of the 1960s" (1992:218), although for them "'[r]esistance' is reduced to the knowing consumption of consumer products" (Callinicos 1989:170). Their fate is summed up in Callinicos' caustic comment - after Jean-Luc Godard - that they are best seen as the "children of Marx and Coca Cola" (*ibid*; see also Lee 1993:107). Godard coined this phrase in reference to the young French characters in *Masculine-Feminine* (1966 French/Swedish). The comments made by one of the film's reviewers amply demonstrates the concept's resonance, even today:

These lovers and their friends, united by indifference and disdain toward the adult world, have a new kind of community in their shared disbelief....the forms of 'Coca-Cola' - the synthetic life they were born to and which they love, and which they make human, and more beautiful and more 'real' than the old just-barely-hanging-on adult culture....The signals are jukebox songs, forms of dress, and, above all, what they do with their hair. Americanization makes them an international society; they have the beauty of youth which can endow Pop with poetry, and they have their feeling for each other and all those shared products and responses by which they know each other (Kael in Billard 1969:281-282).

Featherstone too maintains that the intermediaries "includes those from the counterculture who have survived from the 1960s and those who have taken up elements of their cultural imagery in different contexts" (1991:21). However, he sees this class fraction as a 'disturbing group' which threatens "traditional petit bourgeois virtues and cultural order", because "they have the capacity to broaden the prevalent notions of consumption, to circulate images of consumption suggesting alternative pleasures and desires, consumption excess, waste and disorder" (*ibid*)³.

The legacy of a failed political project is thus the focal point for debate regarding the new cultural intermediaries, and the question of agency still remains. The radical impulse of art, which they are charged with eviscerating - advertising creatives were once referred to as 'commercial artists' - *can be* reconstituted, but with a vital difference: "[t]he most offensive forms of this art - punk rock, say, or what is called sexually explicit material - are all taken in stride by society, and they are commercially successful, unlike the productions of the older high modernism" (Jameson 1983:124). Taking Jameson's second example, one might compare the "dangerous and explosive" potential of 'oppositional art' ("ugly, dissonant, bohemian, sexually shocking") with the recent imagery generated in Calvin Klein's campaign for jeans. Although withdrawn due to widespread accusations that it was suggestive of child pornography, the ads were 'commercially successful' precisely because of the outrage they engendered (similarly, Benetton's 'offensive' - meaning their massive, 'global' marketing campaign, *and* their tactical agitation of progressive and conservative views on decency, religion, and sexuality⁴).

³Colin Campbell uses the terms 'neophiliac' and 'tastemaker' in his discussion of the differential take-up of new consumer goods. Of the former, he says: "These are the individuals who appear to place a high value on the stimulus which is provided by the unfamiliar whilst perceiving the known as boring". See Colin Campbell (1992) 'The desire for the new: Its nature and social location as presented in theories of fashion and moder.. consumerism' in Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (eds.) Consuming Technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces London, Routledge, pp.48-64.

⁴Paula Amad has referred to Benetton's approach as 'radical inauthenticity'. See Paula Amad (1994) Radical Inauthenticity and Cultural Anxiety: The Benetton Advertising Phenomenon MA thesis, Department of English, University of Melbourne.

Regardless of whether the new cultural intermediaries (be they the 'generational cohort' of the 1960s, or their rather less celebrated inheritors of subsequent decades) can best be described as subversive or merely 'playful', their combined efforts now constitute a hugely significant - if not *the* most significant - arena for the articulation and dissemination of popular cultural values. Within this milieu of "market-oriented consumer cultural occupations" (Featherstone 1991:35) advertising creatives must surely be pre-eminent, since descriptions of the intermediaries' activities often resonate with the rhetoric of critical *and* culturalist accounts of the process of advertising:

The new tastemakers, constantly on the lookout for new cultural goods and experiences, are also engaged in the production of popular pedagogies and guides to living and lifestyle. They encourage an inflation in cultural goods, constantly draw upon artistic and intellectual trends for inspiration, and help to create new conditions of artistic and intellectual production by working alongside them. (*ibid*)

Indeed, Bonner and du Gay's (1992) paper on the TV melodrama *thirtysomething* (in which the two main - male - characters are a copywriter/art director team) relies on the central assertion that "the term 'thirtysomething' delineates a particular service class fraction - the new petite bourgeoisie - and that the characters in the series are best viewed as both reflecting and promoting the distinction of this social group" (1992:175).

Inside the 'Magic' Circle

Harvey characterizes creatives by the slightly sinister trait of feeding on "serious cultural products" and then producing (excreting?) "popular materials for the wider mass-culture audience" (1991:68). Featherstone, while acknowledging that they may indeed "ransack various traditions and cultures", detects a certain predicament in propagating their "elite provincialism" (Marchand 1985:xvii):

Their habitus, dispositions and lifestyle preferences are such that they identify with artists and intellectuals, yet under conditions of the demonopolization of artistic and intellectual commodity enclaves they have the apparent contradictory interests of sustaining the prestige and cultural capital of these enclaves, while at the same time popularizing and making them more accessible to wider audiences (Featherstone 1991:19).

We might thus contrast Harvey's conception of ad creatives (and designers, etc.) as 'culture vultures' with Featherstone's notion of '*cultured* vultures'. Both formulations compare favourably with Lears' description of the 'extraordinarily talented people' who have been associated with advertising:

These artists and writers have served, in a sense, as emissaries between social universes: the agency-client world and the wider population; art and big business; museum and commercial culture. They have worked various boundaries, sometimes creatively reconnecting aesthetics and everyday life, more often conforming out of necessity to the constraints of agency organization (Lears 1994:262).

Regardless, the question of conscience is always present; likewise the contradictions of being a would-be artist in the service of capital(ism). Critically, this paradox is *emotionally* charged:

Obliged to live out the contradiction between their messianic aspirations and the reality of their practice, to cultivate uncertainty as to their social identity in order to be able to accept it, and therefore condemned to a questioning of the world which masks an anxious self-questioning, these 'intellectual lackeys' are predisposed to experience with particular intensity the existential mood of a whole intellectual generation (Bourdieu 1984:366n)

***The New Avant-Garde (of Consumption):
Advertising as a 'Post-modern' Pedagogy***

If we consider the new petit bourgeois to be a "natural consumer" (Featherstone's term, quoted in Bonner & du Gay 1992:181); collectively, a fraction whose 'investment orientation to life' suggests that they are actually creating, within their own ranks, the 'perfect consumer', then surely this idealized entity also harbours the lived contradictions of which Bourdieu speaks? To this end we should take into consideration Robins' suggestion that "[i]n general, the consumer has been conceived as a rational-aesthetic being, concerned with how best to satisfy needs, confirm identity or achieve pleasure...vulnerability and anxiety, and the consequent motivation to avoid discomfort and unpleasure, are also significant factors that should be taken into account" (1994:455). Thus the members of this class fraction "are forced to invent the skilfully ambiguous discourses and practices that

were, so to speak, inscribed in advance in the very definition of [their] position"⁵ (Bourdieu 1984:366n) - both as constituents of a fraction characterized by the work it performs, involving "presentation and representation" (*ibid*:359), and as consumers; i.e. as both class fraction and taste culture.

The perceived shortfall in income and career expectations associated with this fraction - what Bourdieu calls an "interrupted trajectory" (1984:357) - provides the motivation for a life-strategy fueled by a need to recover an unfulfilled sense of entitlement:

Seeking its occupational and personal salvation in the imposition of new doctrines of ethical salvation, the new petite bourgeoisie is predisposed to play a vanguard role in the struggles over everything concerned with the art of living, in particular, domestic life and consumption, relations between the sexes and the generations, the reproduction of the family and its values (Bourdieu 1984:366, also quoted in Bonner & du Gay 1992:177).

Seen against a background of old petit-bourgeois values, such as those manifested in Thatcherism (which "mount[ed] strong attacks on artists and intellectuals in the name of Victorian values" (Featherstone 1991:36)), the relative standing of this new class fraction is embodied in "the Eliasian metaphor of a balance, with swings toward the centres of symbolic production in the 1960s and 1970s and swings away toward the greater dominance of centres of economic production in the 1980s"⁶ (*ibid*). We might then compare the consolidated and self-assured legitimacy of the older, established class fractions with the peculiarly emotional and unstable orientation of the newer one.

Lears (1983) argues that the historical roots of capitalist industrial society are to be found in the decline of religious beliefs and the emergence of a substitute 'therapeutic' world of consumption. In sum, Jhally (1989) suggests that this newly-individualized 'concern for physical and emotional health' was a response to "feelings of 'unreality' that arose in this period" (1989:220). The development of a 'therapeutic ethos', central to the nature of

⁵i.e. "between the subjective image of the occupational project and the objective function of the occupation" (Bourdieu 1984:366n)

⁶Featherstone draws this idea from C. Wouters (1987) 'Developments in the Behavioural Codes Between the Sexes' *Theory, Culture & Society* 4, 2-3.

contemporary consumption, finds its perpetuation in the work of the new petite bourgeoisie, whose "sense of legitimacy in educating others in 'how to live' by a 'symbolic action'...not only produces the need for its own goods and services, but also, in the long run, legitimates itself and the lifestyle(s) it puts forward as a model" (Bonner & du Gay 1992:183).

Furthermore, the "promotion of an ethic of lifestyle and pleasure allows them to reconcile their objective role as servicers of capitalist culture with their subjective aspirations to lead a 'good' life and make the world a better place" (*ibid*:179). This "'skilfully ambiguous' therapeutic discourse", played out in the context of *thirtysomething* (and embodied in Lears' study of pioneering ad executive Bruce Barton (Lears 1983)), actually provides a surprising secondary use for the TV melodrama: Bonner and du Gay note an emergent tendency amongst therapists in the USA to use taped episodes from the series in working with their clients: "a generation of 'thirtysomethings' that is struggling with feelings of uncertainty while pursuing the American dream" (Hersch in Bonner & du Gay 1992:179).

Three Ethnographies of Advertising

Ethnographies of the advertising business are few and far between, and can be seen as an attempt to reduce the formal distance between the scholar and his or her area of interest. This section draws into consideration the work of three researchers intent on conducting empirical research into the formalized operations of the advertising process. Each is characterized by a common concern to address perceived deficiencies in the existing literature with which they are associated. Their particular relevance to this thesis is the way in which the relative significance of the creative function is both conceived and articulated.

In her analysis of the advertising process, published in the *Journal of Advertising*, Hirschman (1989) uses a role-based method which emphasizes a relativist, rather than positivist, approach to assessing the social processes within and between organizations. This concentration on the "experiential aspects most salient to each participant" (1989:52)

lead her to base her arguments on the evidence of six interviews with six individuals "who played roles central to the creation and production of televised advertisements", namely: a product manager (i.e. the client's representative); an agency account executive; a copywriter and an art director, both of whom had reached the promotional position of creative director; an agency producer; and an independent commercials director. What is instructive about Hirschman's work is that it clearly positioned itself against most advertising and marketing research, particularly in considering advertising in a 'production of culture' frame (*ibid*:42).

Much of the evidence supplied by the creatives corresponds with the interview findings in this chapter, particularly insofar as "the art director, copywriter, and commercial[s] director viewed the advertisement as a communication vehicle for promoting their own aesthetic viewpoints and personal career objectives" (1989:51). Furthermore, Hirschman proposes that "authorship of the advertisement is reserved for those who contributed *ideational/artistic resources* to its production" (*ibid*:50), i.e. copywriter, art director, and commercial director. However, having loosened the constraints of positivist/functionalist research, she apparently neglects to enquire as to the broader, personal aspirations and influences of the creatives - which is a particular strength of the set of interviews analyzed above. Her claim regarding antagonism between 'self-serving' creatives and the 'client-serving' executive, manager, and producer, is thus unconvincing: "It is important to note that this conflict is not centred within an artistic-managerial ideological dispute....Rather, it originates in and is perpetuated by the different avenues the participants utilize for advancing in their careers" (*ibid*:51). Surely both factors are of importance, since it is precisely the "personal (not institutional) ideology" (*ibid*) of creatives which informs their alternative desire to write novels or screenplays, draw, or paint, 'free' of the commercial demands they habitually operate within?

Karen Shapiro's investigation, entitled 'The Construction of Television Commercials: Four Cases of Interorganizational Problem Solving' (1981), and Don Slater's 'Advertising as a

Commercial Practice: Business Strategy and Social Theory' (1985) are far more developed studies, both involving comparable methodologies. Both rely heavily on interviews with individuals responsible for various functions in several agencies, and a specific focus on the particular brands, commercials, or marketing problems current at the time. Shapiro is concerned with the patterns of communication within, and between, the client and agency organizations during the production of four television ads (at four separate agencies); Slater approached three agencies, again with the intention of recording the various manifestations of the strategies, or 'situated practical reasoning' (1985:9) which originate with the client and finally manifest themselves as pieces of promotional communication.⁷

In common with arguments put forward here, Slater takes issue with the fact that advertising, "[t]hroughout its history within critical discourse...has been equated with the analysis of textual production....the study of *advertising*...with the analysis of *advertisements*" (1985:4, emphasis added). Slater sees his task as unearthing the relationships which constitute advertising as a commercial practice - as a prerequisite for any understanding of advertising as a *social* practice. Ultimately, then, he is most interested in those elements in the organization which relate to 'business strategies', 'sales technologies', and 'commercial genesis, intention or context'.

The methodological bias in Slater's approach is twofold, and both factors relate to the way in which the creative element is conceived. The first issue concerns his "interviews with a cross-section of agency personnel, with a concentration on account handlers" (1985:199). This emphasis would not be particularly important were it not for the fact that his ultimate valorization of 'commercial logic' is at the expense of so-called 'autonomous logic', or, "the ideological battle between strategy and 'creativity' " (*ibid*:222). While maintaining the primacy of strategy (1985:248), Slater recognizes many aspects of the 'humanist' or 'intuitive' currents in a otherwise 'rationalist' organizational matrix (*ibid*:249). Referring to

⁷Slater also conducted a separate study of "cosmetics accounts held at six different advertising agencies" (1985:199).

'relatively autonomous factors' which "obviously do enter into advertising at the level of 'creative work' in the agency" (*ibid*:247), he acknowledges a "strong element of unpredictability" in "the dependence of 'culture industries' on creative processes" (*ibid*:248). He credits Enzensberger with this observation, and the notion of such institutional uncertainty is reiterated in Shapiro's work (1981:342,353,357). Slater is also aware that creatives draw on personal experience, 'tacit or conscious knowledge', and "are susceptible to the temptation to follow the internal logic of various signifying practices....of getting involved in what 'looks good' in terms of design conventions or film grammar" (Slater 1985:248). It is already clear, through the interviews (above) and Shapiro's work, that these tendencies are not so much transgressive as utterly intrinsic to the work of the creatives; regardless, Slater apparently claims that 'art ideology and education' result in copywriters and art directors "straying 'too far' from advertising logic". Much of this is partitioned off as 'rogue creativity' (1985:248).

The second manifestation of Slater's methodological bias occurs in the types of agencies approached, given the generalizable division between creative- and marketing-oriented firms. While Shapiro attempts to achieve a representative sample of large-, medium-, and small-sized agencies, one with a particularly notable creative reputation, Slater - apparently unaware of Shapiro's work - chooses only large agencies, "because it was felt that as 'mature' and more bureaucratized organizations, their systems, procedures, production process and division of labour would be more well-established, codified, formulated and accessible" (Slater 1985:200-201). However, Shapiro notes that "[r]ules, regulating mechanisms and standard operating procedures are dysfunctional for generating creative work" (1981:357). Thus the 'ideological battle' which Slater identifies between creative and commercial practices is almost won by default, given his choice of interviewees and agencies. His approach was even criticized by his subjects, some of whom noted that his fieldwork had "an inbuilt bias towards agencies which are more-marketing-oriented than smaller or younger agencies"; he adds, "[t]his has some significance for our argument"

(1985:201). In his own formulation, 'marketing-oriented' agencies may even be subject to a certain amount of stagnation, since it is 'creative-oriented' firms which "are generally the most dynamic and innovatory" (*ibid*:249); "[a]ccording to several creative people, good agencies are not 'very organized'. They are looser and not as bureaucratic or 'militaristic'⁸ as other agencies" (Shapiro 1981:41). Furthermore, Shapiro has noted that, in her discussion of reputedly creative-oriented, or 'hot', agencies, "[s]prinkled through other big agencies are pockets of creativity. At some of the largest agencies, such as Y & R (Young and Rubicam), in-house 'boutiques' have been set up to avoid the bureaucracy, and to create strong, emotional or 'image' ads" (1981:40). (It should also be noted that although Shapiro's and Slater's studies were carried out on opposite sides of the Atlantic, Y & R was one of the firms investigated by Slater, albeit their UK office.)

To be fair, these limitations concern an aspect of the advertising process which, by strict definition, is somewhat peripheral to Slater's thesis. However, it is instructive that in his reaction to "twenty years of structuralism and cultural criticism" (*ibid*:4); in his decision to counter the reductive tendencies of "the analysis of signification and ideology" (*ibid*:253), that he must also minimalise the perceived significance of creativity. Despite these somewhat partisan tendencies there are marked similarities between Slater's work and the more generalized, exploratory investigations of Shapiro: while Slater must finally admit that "strategy can eventuate in any of a potentially infinite number of possible representations" (1985:247), Shapiro notes that, in 'executing' the strategy, "the options [provided] are storyboards imagined by the creatives from a boundless set of possible executions" (1981:256). The integral, if not vital, role of creatives is therefore bound up in an anti-rational activity which cannot be captured in the mechanistic - even Taylorist - rhetoric that Slater *and* Shapiro habitually employ (and which inevitably occur in this thesis). For Shapiro, art directors and copywriters are "the *core technology* required to carry out the creative *work process*. They are hired to solve problems, to *generate* a different advertising

⁸See also Cooper (1989:22).

product each time through the process" (1981:37, emphasis added). The use of humanist or organic metaphors is restricted to a reminder that creatives are 'the heart of the agency'. For Slater, too, creatives are involved in the '*production* of significations'; advertising "is simply one operational element, one sales technology amongst the many which comprise marketing" (1985:5). Reminiscent of Jones' (1986) notion of the small apparatus (the creative department) inside the large machine (the agency), creativity represents a central, indispensable phenomenon which is, however, entirely at odds with the discursive and conceptual frames available to describe it.

Given the tendencies outlined above, it is unsurprising that some creatives subscribe to the analogous - but *downsized* - notion of advertising as a 'cottage industry'; a characterization which replaces the connotations of 'heavy' automata with an aura of craftsmanship⁹.

Section Two: Professional Perspectives - A Case Study

The creative product is the one irreducible part of an agency - the one thing clients cannot do.

David Abbott, Creative Director *Abbott Mead Vickers*
(The Economist June 9, 1990)

In order to understand better the influences, expectations, and aspirations of creatives - and how these supplement the theoretical and empirical accounts so far discussed - this section primarily involves an analysis of five interviews conducted in 1993 with senior creative personnel at four North American ad agencies¹⁰. This is contextualised with secondary sources such as other interviews and trade articles; I also draw - implicitly at least - on my own prior experience as an art director in London from 1989 to 1993.

⁹See for example B. Snider (1993) 'They Fire Clients, Don't They?' *WIRED* December, 64-67.

¹⁰I am indebted to Sut Jhally and Steve Kline for the use of this material.

The material reveals advertising creatives to be both a class fraction *and* a taste culture; their gravitation towards new styles and trends being constitutive of their position as a delineated, 'no-collar' group with a marked affiliation - and aversion - to the middle classes. The most tangible demonstration of this antagonism is manifested in the relationship between creatives and 'suits' (i.e. the managerial and administrative staff which provides a liaison between the agency and the client).

Creative Careers and Class

Lears has noted that, typically, advertising personnel in the 1930s were "affluent, metropolitan, secular, and sophisticated"; a 'corporate elite' of highly educated WASP males (Lears 1989:50). It would appear that very little has changed since then: Adam Lury, himself a university graduate and joint-founder of Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury, one of the UK's most successful new agencies of recent years, notes that "[m]ost people who currently hold power in advertising agencies and who are directly involved in the production of advertising are university educated"; the voluntary guidelines they use "institutionalize a view of society that can best be summarized as white, male and middle class" (1994:91-2).

The five interviewees whose transcripts are analyzed here for the first time, are white males, for the most part middle-aged (although the youngest is twenty-nine), all with extensive educations: a degree in journalism with a minor in advertising; a double major in English and marketing; a marketing degree with a minor in advertising; and a graduate degree in English. The subjects were all very forthcoming, often using anecdotes, examples, and jokes to illustrate their comments. Their tone ranged from authoritative to occasionally bombastic.

Generally they worked their way up from junior positions, sometimes in provincial agencies, and occasionally picked up some experience in another department, such as media, or account-handling. In explaining their choice of career, several subjects reveal a

kind of serendipity: "I got my foot in the door...and it just worked out great for me. It was a good balance between this kind of writing and thinking. It married well with my interest in film and literature and suddenly I had a career" (A)¹¹; "I wanted to go to a really creative agency so I took my book [portfolio] and immediately got a job on a great account" (B). Another interviewee says, with obvious enthusiasm, "these people were having fun, these people were involved in something akin to show business" (C). An alternative account suggests that, although some aspirants might always have had an interest in working in advertising, other career options, other *creative* outlets (such as "writing screen plays and novels, composing music, writing lyrics, designing furniture, or directing feature films" (Shapiro 1981:43)¹² might also have been a possibility, were it not for the disproportionate financial rewards available within the business. At this point, "it becomes 'the only game in town' " (*ibid*).

Career progression is always measured through an incantation of names: the agencies, clients, and products with which each individual has been associated; as Shapiro notes, "frequent job changes are functional for creatives in advertising" (1981:44). All three factors tend to be evaluated according to their *creative* prestige, such as the kudos of the brands; the reputation of the agencies; or the size of the potential audience (i.e. the size of account - national being preferred to regional). To illustrate: "accounts create agencies; and the bottom line is *yes*, you *die* to get accounts like that. You kill...to get a running shoe account....It's a showcase, it allows you to do great work" (B); "I worked on [Dr.Pepper] for three years, and that is another dream account. Probably the best I ever worked on" (B).

¹¹ The interviewees' responses are coded throughout this section to ensure anonymity; further details may be provided on request.

¹² The advertising man in *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983) admits that "I earn so much money at what I do that I can't even begin to defend it. I used to shoot a whole line about the value and necessity of advertising..." Ian McEwan (1985) *The Ploughman's Lunch* London, Methuen, p.25.

On the Job: Scientific Research vs. Creative Instincts

The particularities of a desirable client-agency relationship - 'great clients, great advertising'

(A) - is summed up in this anecdote:

In terms of process, I think that different agencies and different clients approach the creative process differently. I don't know if it's so much the campaign, as it is the work environment. For example, when I worked on Budweiser, the very nature of that account, that agency at that time: D'Arcy, MacManus and Masius in St. Louis, and the nature of the client - Anheuser-Busch - was a very collaborative process. The client had very high regard for creative people, which is very difficult to find in most clients. They had an instinctive trust, and they looked up to creative people because they really saw that they could bring forth great thinking that could translate into major movement in their brands. And, as a result, they were a lot more forgiving; they encouraged risk-taking on the part of the agency. (A)

As creative directors, the interviewees are clearly concerned with safeguarding the quality of output from their departments, and this is measured in a very particular way:

if you talk to most creatives, they're always striving to be original. They're striving to create something that is unlike anything else that is on the air. It becomes part of your everyday existence, and so it becomes a given; a mandate; or a credo, and there are some agencies where creativity has nothing to do with it. It really depends on who you talk to. I would say that most good creatives are always striving to be different (D).

The preferred criteria are expressly *not* those imposed from without; any kind of quantitative research which seeks to establish an objective evaluation on completed work - known as 'testing the creative' - is vehemently renounced by the subjects, since " '[n]o truly innovative idea can ever be tested if it's truly innovative' because people won't know how to react to it" (B). (This sentiment is not at all uncommon, and is, for example, faithfully echoed by adman¹³ Robert Pritikin, in interview with Michael Schudson (1993:83).) The only director who is remotely critical of this attitude is quick to qualify his initial comment: "what a lot of people in the creative industry do is that they use research that goes well as a defence, and they use it differently if it doesn't....But campaigns should not be pulled from the air nor should they be prohibited from going on air because of some

¹³The gendered term 'adman' is purposely used throughout this thesis as a reminder; to reflect the true nature of an institution which has, historically, been overwhelmingly managed by men.

scores" (C). However, clients are accused of post-rationalization, too, such as the commissioning of 'smokescreen' research - which will allow them to make any decision they see fit, regardless of the agency's advice (Leiss *et al.* 1990:183).

That creatives need feedback is not in dispute: "I find [qualitative research] useful in developing and evaluating advertising, and learning about a product that I might be advertising. I find it useful deciding about how people think about my products in a competitive set[ting]" (B). However, timing is *crucial*: "This agency in particular does not believe in testing the creative; it believes in testing the strategy" (D). In other words, creatives "would rather take the idea to the table early with consumers. Find out if an idea has any intrigue to it...focus groups are good for ideas; they're not good for evaluating" (A). It appears that the opinions of a target audience, or the public in general, are valorized by creatives when they can be controlled and filtered; the subjective and contingent nature of focus groups allows feedback to be accepted or rejected as deemed necessary.

For creatives at least, a dependence or insistence on testing, whether because of the client or the agency itself, is anathema (also noted by Schudson 1993:82). When such methods are employed, they stand accused of gross inconsistencies: "I think a lot of great work is killed in testing, and I think a lot of bad work is killed in testing as well. And what's unfortunate is that the great work is being killed because of the way it's been tested" (B). Tony Brignull, an English copywriter of long-standing repute in the business, sums up 'what we all know to be true': "large agencies in collusion with large marketing departments, arbitrated over by research companies often arrive finally and wearily at a least worst result: commercials of stultifying predictability that nobody even notices"¹⁴.

¹⁴Tony Brignull (1992) 'The adman's lament' The Guardian September 21, p23.

Lifestyle in the Workplace: A Taste Culture & 'Organic' Research

The resources upon which creatives rely, in order to perform their work, are by no means limited to research material generated within the agency. Indeed, the information provided in creative briefs, including psychographic and demographic profiles, appears to be used only as a touchstone once the process of invention is underway (C; Shapiro 1981:370). Creatives may also seek out personal views, such as canvassing public opinion (in this example, about the particular product category in which the interviewee works): "I like to talk to people at the gas pump. You know: 'Nice truck. Why did you buy it?'" (C). Aside from the more obvious examples of practical research such as this, there is a further, and greatly significant, source. The previous quotation continues thus: "It's fun: we're all consumers, we're all consuming something at any point in life" (C). Pivotal to this thesis is the assertion that creatives draw on their experience as consumers at least as much as any acumen they accumulate through their lives 'on the job'. Besides, formal training is neither a necessity nor a norm. As one of Michael Schudson's interviewees comments, "I don't know anything now, after twelve years in the business, I didn't know when I began, except some technique" (1993:85).

Karen Shapiro's ethnographic study of four advertising agencies (1981) includes many references to the functional importance of the "aesthetic tastes and idiosyncratic assumptions held by the creatives" (1981:278). This reliance on "[a]nything they encounter - in their personal lives as well as in the work setting" (*ibid*:277) runs from the obvious, such as casting sessions (a particular woman was chosen to appear in a commercial because "the men responsible...found her attractive and...thought that most people in the audience would also" (*ibid*:83)), or using the product ("to find benefits that they can then tell consumers about, based on their own experiences" (*ibid*:48)), to rather more esoteric instances. This begins with the appropriation and adaptation of stylistic and technical innovations: "if I see something interesting, if I see some technique done in a movie, I will

always apply that to an advertisement....[from] the regular Hollywood, all the way down to the obscure foreign films which are not so popular but you can preen elements from that" (D). This is perfectly illustrated in the emergence of 'morphing', which is an advanced computer technique which gives the appearance of one 'real' object metamorphosing into another, on-screen. This had been popularized in the movie *Terminator 2* (1991 US) and is mentioned by nearly all the interviewees as a fad, since it had already become over-used in advertising. As with many 'obvious' techniques, there is always the danger that the resultant stylization will eclipse the need for content of any substance, so that the audience reaction quickly dampens: "The first time will be interesting, the second time on : 'Oh yeah watch this, this is where [the rock] turns into a truck...' Some people use the technology available to us instead of an idea, instead of a compelling reason" (C). As another subject points out, "I don't think...that staying current gets you there. It's not discovering a new technique that gets you there; sometimes it helps, but it's inventing a new technique: inventing something in your head and then getting someone to go and do it. It's these new fictions" (A). The 'fictions' referred to here are ads which, rather than being derivative, he sees as 'totally original': "when someone does it, and when it does work, it puts you so far above everyone else, so out-distances everyone else, that the power is just unbelievable" (A).

'Organic' research begins with ads on TV, on the radio, and in magazines, but at its most intense there is an expressed need for total immersion in the cultural environment: "within my creative department you can't name a movie, foreign or domestic, that someone here hasn't seen; a book that someone hasn't read. People in our industry thrive on stimulus. We're pretty much in touch" (A); "You have to be a cultural junkie. It's not just media, but it's radio, it's art, fashion, walking down the street, not living in one place, traveling" (B).

Moreover, *personal* interpretation wins out over public opinion:

I think that a lot of times, an outsider will look at a creative team as saying: 'Now I'm this person and how am I going to react to this?' That's not how I believe most creatives work. Most creatives will develop work that is appealing

to themselves personally, and the ones who are successful in it are the ones who are tapped into what is most culturally popular - or they're very aware of what's going on, and they might see one aspect or phenomenon that is happening in the movie industry, and they will preen from that and apply it towards advertising. They tend to be very aware of their surroundings: they like what the masses like, and so they end up creating stuff that they like, and so it turns out that the majority of the population likes it too. But I don't think that people transpose themselves onto whoever they're trying to talk to (D).

A radical alternative, apparently favoured by very few, is an introverted approach which one subject refers to derisively as the "Trappist monk theory": "see nothing and do nothing and have it all come from within". He adds: "[p]ersonally I'll think that the most subscribe to *my* school. I hire that way" (B).

The evident commitment to some kind of holy grail of originality, institutionalized in a number of national and international creative awards programs, has many effects. While, for one subject, the creative process is ultimately a matter of sometimes 'dramatic' compromise with the client (D), only one categorically denies any *a priori* motivation beyond the formal requirements of the job: "Our purpose is to sell products for our clients. If we win awards along the way, that's fine if it makes some people happy." Not that he is entirely averse to the notion: "I've gotten some awards but they get buried behind you underneath some bookcase" (C). Although this individual is the creative director in a regional office of a major international agency, his superior, the agency's *overall* creative director for North America, appears to disagree:

The bottom line affects us, but there is one thing that creative people have, that the rest of the business people and the business don't have, and that's 'ego gratification'. To win an award in our business doesn't mean much to a client; they don't give a shit if you win an award. If anything, they'll think that's all you want to do: win awards. What they don't realize is that's the great motivation for a creative person. We're here to make a salary, but it's also to be respected by his [*sic*] peers for work that has made the people [i.e. consumers] hopeful, made the people crazy (E).

This view is taken to its logical extreme by two interviewees, who clearly feel that sales are secondary, if not irrelevant. When asked if effectiveness is 'a criteria [*sic*] for brilliance', the first replied: "No. I think that creative people admire a lot of advertising and they don't

really care if it's successful in a pure sense of whether it moved products off the shelves. I think creative people look at advertising in a pure sense. Do they think it's a fresh approach" (A). In consideration of a question regarding the criteria used to judge the submissions for creative awards competitions, the second answered: "What they call great advertising, I would call great advertising. It has nothing to do with sales. It has to do with what's the work like, how does it feel?" (B). The experienced art director interviewed by Elizabeth Hirschman (1989) responded to potential criticism of such motives thus: "My attitude is that whatever is good for [me] is good for the client!" (1989:47).

In his text on the management of creative people, Winston Fletcher, himself a well-known English copywriter and agency creative head, notes that "[a]bove all, creatives adore awards because they buttress their importance. In renouncing Mammon and exalting aesthetics, the accolades accentuate the relationship between commercial creativity and pure art" (1990:14). Shapiro reports that "some advertising agencies refuse to allow creatives to submit their work in creative competitions" (1981:331), though she neglects to name any. The picture that emerges is of a micro-culture within the advertising industry which is clearly in ideological tension with the supposed mission of the business as a whole. This may be perpetuated for the simple reason that award-winning work is the single most important asset that an ambitious creative can have. As the same director put it: they're "a measuring stick, [a] salary-getter" (B); or, drawing out the marketing metaphor, "[y]ou make your bones, you get your award, you get some press, and then you *merchandise* it to get a better job" (E, emphasis added).

Competitiveness figures large in this environment: "On the one hand we have the bottom line, attacking. On the other hand you have this ego; this need to be better than the next person. And that's what makes the creative person great" (E; see also Shapiro 1981:44). Another interviewee concurs: " Artists are the most jealous, petty people in the world: 'What's he [*sic*] written? It's trash'. And then secretly they're poring through it in the

night, because he [*sic*] knows it's brilliant, and advertising people thrive on that; that's what sends them back to their papers, their computer terminals, and their drawing boards" (A).

The apparent chasm between the pursuit of sales effectiveness and creative excellence is particularly noticeable in the orientation of awards schemes. While creatives value ads 'in and of themselves', clients in particular do not; in sum, effectiveness and creative innovation can be achieved independently of one another, "due to the *varied personal utilities* of the produced advertisement" (Hirschman 1989:43,42; emphasis added). At least one interviewee reiterated the generally regarded belief that these two categories tend to produce mutually-exclusive winners¹⁵, although "[o]ccasionally the same advertisement may fulfill both sets of goals" (1989:51).

The work that creative directors choose to nurture in their departments is utterly dependent on their own perspective in this debate. One interviewee cited the example of a cereal campaign which had once received the top 'F.E. Award' for effectiveness, saying "I wouldn't put that on my [show] reel. I think it sucks. It sells a lot of Quaker stuff, but you can get anybody to do that" (B). This last comment is a reference to his belief, expressed earlier in the interview, that there is no particular skill involved in writing ads designed to test well. Indeed, he demonstrates this using a spontaneous example which comprises every element that is known to generate high scores, such as early and repeated mention of the brand name, and a clear visual analogy to demonstrate the product in action ('very flat-footed'). One of Shapiro's (1981) interviewees concurs that it is "possible to write for the tests" (1981:331). Conversely, *originality* of approach and content is coveted: "we never

¹⁵This is, however, an eternally contentious point, as a recent, international survey by the agency Leo Burnett has demonstrated. See Michele Martin (1995) 'Do Creative Commercials Sell?' *Campaign* September 22, pp.34-35. This "unique study of the 200 most awarded commercials in the world in 1992 and 1993....concluded that an award-winning ad is more than two-and-a-half times more likely to sell than one that is not".

suppress a good idea. That's a big taboo" (D); "I have to find some way of protecting these people, so that their big ideas do not get lost" (E).

In principle at least, creatives valorize above all else those opportunities which allow the 'big idea' its most clear and unfettered communication: "I won an award for a commercial that I made for under ten thousand dollars and of all the awards that I've gotten in my career, it's the one I prized the most, because it's all idea...It's a brilliant category [of award]: it insists on brilliant ideas. The advertising that I like is generally stuff where the idea is so important, so big that, naked and unadorned, it's a powerhouse idea. They're the hardest to find, of course" (A). Another interviewee expresses a very similar view when he refers to two examples as "[v]ery simple kinds of advertising, which makes it very powerful and very effective....because it is using intelligence over execution, over flash and glitz and big production. It's sort of showing off its thinking" (D).

New Career Definitions: Image-Based Advertising and the Role of Emotions

The historical shift to an image-based culture is well documented (see, in particular, Leiss *et al.* 1990). The correspondent changes in the organization of the advertising business reflect this change, most obviously in the rise to prominence of the art director (Mayer 1991:96, Ogilvy 1983:32, Shapiro 1981:39). Until relatively recently, the copywriter was chiefly responsible for producing advertising concepts - and copy - which were then executed by far less exalted personnel whose job was merely to realize on paper the copywriter's intentions. By contrast, it is now standard industry practice to pair up art directors and copywriters - the former having emerged from this 'service' role - in a constant working relationship; an 'intense collaboration'. One of Hirschman's interviewees described it thus:

Now, I'm an art director so...I'm supposed to hopefully come up with some visual ideas...and [the writer] will hopefully be strong in the more verbal, words, area for headlines, theme lines...[although] it doesn't really work that way. In the end, we're just two people working together....You have to be comfortable with each other...[and] not worry about a sense of [individual] authorship....Whosever idea is the stronger idea, you've got to defer to that (in Hirschman 1989:47).

The ideal scenario is one in which a certain creative synergy emerges, leading to the production of ideas of a quality which is more than the sum of the parts/participants¹⁶. Even though "visual execution is now understood to be the heart of [brand] image generation" (Mayer 1991:96) the art director is valued more for conceptual input than the capacity to visualize: "Art directors today don't draw....It's not even a requirement...he's [*sic*] supposed to think, how can we communicate a strategy. We've come a long way from what we used to call 'wrists' " (Rosenshine in Mayer, *ibid*; see also Shapiro 1981:39). Mayer attributes this change to Bill Bernbach, a seminal character in the 'creative revolution' of American advertising in the early 1960s (Fox 1984:218; Schudson 1993:75,79; Ogilvy 1983:189; Leiss *et al.* 1990:183; Shapiro 1981:40).

It becomes clear, in attempting to investigate the concept of creativity, that it carries an intimate link to emotion. Bernbach, an art director, and founder of Doyle Dane Bernbach, is very widely quoted, perhaps even more so since his death in 1982. Two of his aphorisms, in particular, sum up the limitations and hindrances of a rationalized, bureaucratic approach to persuasion:

We are beginning to understand that those wonderful, tangible, big numbers on our profit statements are the result not of a scientific, logical, arithmetical putting down of our products' advantages that obeys to the letter our copy platform, but rather an original expression of those advantages that touches and moves the beholder because it unexplainably stirs his [*sic*] emotions....The difference is in the fingertips. (1980:206ff)

I can put down on a page a picture of a man crying, and it's just a picture of a man crying. Or I can put him down in such a way as to make you want to cry. The difference is artistry - the intangible thing that business distrusts (Bernbach)

These sentiments - a 'creative credo' - are echoed in some of the comments made by the five interviewees. The difficulty one subject had in attempting to convey why he liked a particular ad is clear: "It's just got a great feel about it. It's like explaining why somebody likes a painting. It's very hard to put into words....It's just entertainment; it's like a good

¹⁶This, at least, was the abiding principle of The School of Communication Arts, a London-based, industry-funded, arts college specializing in the training of art directors and copywriters.

movie. That's the best way to put it. I walk away from it and I feel good about the product" (B). Shapiro notes that "[w]hen creative people are asked how they can tell if a commercial is good, they are most likely to respond that they can tell by the way they feel" (1981:329); words chosen by her interviewees included 'feels good'; 'instinctive'; 'gut feeling'; 'vibes'. Faith in the 'power' of an 'emotional connect' relies on the belief that "your heart will take you further than your brain in the long run" (A).

For another interviewee, who believes emphatically that advertising 'runs on emotion', success depends on a confluence of factors such as, in TV, "beautiful production values, excellent writing, choice of voice[-over], choice of music....there's only a few times when all those things happen so that there's sort of this magic that comes out of it. All those things can come together and elicit an emotion. The ones that elicit emotions are the ones that win [awards]" (D). These views on the centrality of emotion are echoed elsewhere: "I think if you can talk to every creative person, they will tell you that emotion is the most important thing you can create" (E). (Conversely, as far as some clients are concerned, "it's just cut and dried....They're not interested in feelings" (in Hirschman 1989:46).)

Conclusions

With us, it is the sad, lugubrious dogs who are sterile and blocked and do nothing. It is the exuberant fellows who produce - the unstable ones.

David Ogilvy (in Steiner 1965:211)

As its title suggests, the main character in the film *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit* was confronted with his own potential anonymity in a system which required absolute conformity: the salaried occupation in New York; the commute to a house in Connecticut; the requisite business uniform(ity); and, the emergent middle class values which underscored it all. This particular life in the 'lonely crowd' did, however, demand creativity and originality of The Man - in complete contrast to every other impetus surrounding him.

In a way, then, the suffocating threat of mediocrity in this 1956 movie can be seen as an abiding metaphor for the demands of a principally modern artistic occupation such as copywriting.

Thirty years later, in a speech to the National Advertisers/Radio Advertising Bureau, Ed McCabe ("the hottest copywriter of the 1970s" (Mayer 1991:98), and president of Scali, McCabe, Sloves Inc.) described the contemporary media scene - advertising, theatre, literature, popular music, modes of dress - thus: "There is a lack of creativity and excitement in everything, everywhere. A sullen sameness prevails" (McCabe 1985). Mediocrity and anonymity are thus the creative's worst nightmare. Suitably enough, he not only describes creativity in advertising as 'complex and amorphous', but as '*abnormal*'; an essentially anti-conservative orientation in which creatives see their innovation as an exercise in risk-taking - for all concerned (most critically, the agencies' clients).

The flight from mediocrity - the 'jump' "from facts into the realm of imagination and ideas" (Bernbach) - has been the subject of much historical conjecture. Fletcher describes several notions which have at some time been fashionable, the two most common of which can be characterized by the 'bolt-from-the-blue': a quasi-divine revelation available only to the 'uniquely gifted' (1990:17); and, the essentially rational notion of 'bisociation', Arthur Koestler's theory in which "two unconnected facts or ideas...form a single idea" (*ibid*:18). The latter is also reminiscent of many left brain/right brain postulations. Fletcher's conclusion is that, for managers, "creativity is, in the final analysis, quintessentially irrational" (*ibid*:22). Similarly for the editor of the *Journal of Advertising*: "[b]y its very nature, creativity defies measurement" (Zinkhan 1993:1).

If this much can be said of creative processes, creative personnel themselves appear unwilling or unable to define precisely how they come up with ideas: "I like to have everything up here because your brain starts to sort, and I have to assume that the creative brain does something differently than the non-creative brain" (C). This creative director

explains a process in which he amasses information and then lays it to one side, allowing himself a period that Fletcher (and Shapiro 1981:356) calls 'incubation':

With the possible exception of Mozart, all of the theorists [including Bertrand Russell], and indeed most great artists, agree that hard, sustained rational thought is required before creation begins. It is implicit in Koestler, de Bono and the rest that creativity does not exist in a vacuum. Creativity blossoms in the fertile soil of rationality. A period of incubation is a pre-requisite, before a new idea can be born (1990:22).

Another creative director's anecdotal explanation for the way in which copywriters and art directors produce new work, often in collusion, has such archetypal overtones that it recalls the frustration and angst even experienced by film characters (as the next chapter reveals):

the creative process in advertising is very similar to the process in fiction, in poetry, and in film-making. The parameters are different, no question, but I think the process is similar. You wake up every morning and you know you're a total failure. You can't imagine that you'll ever do what you did last week and it may have been terrific. You're convinced that the muse has totally left you forever, but suddenly you put yourself in front of a piece of paper and you give yourself enough coffee or Diet Coke, and you're convinced that if something doesn't happen soon, you'll kill yourself. And suddenly, it happens, and the difference mostly when you do it as a poet, a film-maker, a fiction writer is that you're doing it alone. Here, you're doing it with other people and that's a help because the cross-fertilization process is a big catalyst of great ideas in our business (A).

Although Fletcher goes to some length in order to discuss the management of creativity, drawing together personal interviews with such cultural industry luminaries as David Puttnam, Michael Grade (Chief Executive, Channel 4 Television), and Wally Olins (Chairman, Wolff Olins), it is his discussion about aspects of temperament which reveal most about the creative personality. Under 'creativity/creatives' - by far the biggest section in the index - he lists, amongst other things: 'amorphous' nature'; 'competitiveness and over-supply'; 'egocentricity'; 'insecurity'; 'motivation'; 'originality and uniqueness'; 'perfectionism'; 'personal worth judged by output'; 'social responsibility of'; and, 'stubborn and rebellious' (1990:139). Many of the more emotive issues, which are often only alluded to here, are explored in much greater detail in Chapter Three, as we move

around Johnson's circuit and shift our perspective from cultural production to consumption, and, in particular, the text.

Chapter Three

The Film Text: Advertising Production as Public Knowledge

cinema, like other public media, takes its raw materials from the pre-existing field of public discourses - the whole field that is, not just from the bit called 'cinema' - and, under the kind of conditions we have examined, from private knowledges too.

Richard Johnson (1986/87:65)

Introduction

A great deal of effort has been expended in the analysis of advertisements - and with good reason - whether in regard to our reception of them, the meanings they promote, or the window they provide on the social-historical world. However, in keeping with the attempt here to garner a fresh understanding of advertising, the study of the text has been re-focused. This chapter is based on the assertion that a significant, yet largely overlooked, resource for our understanding of advertising, and creative processes, as a cultural and social phenomenon is to be found elsewhere in popular culture.

Hidden away in a few theoretical accounts of advertising one can find brief mention of certain media products, such as novels and films, which involve plot-lines and narratives about advertising as a social phenomenon and/or as a business practice. Further investigation reveals that this is a surprisingly common theme, finding some kind of expression in almost fifty English-language movies since the 1930s¹. Of these, around thirty actually portray the lives of fictionalized characters whose exploits are largely concerned with their advertising careers. Indeed, this medium represents both an enduring

¹A variety of partial sources were combined with extensive personal research. The main references were: John Walker, ed. (1993) Halliwel's Filmgoer's and video viewer's companion New York, Harper Perennial; Martin Connors and Julia Furtaw (1996) Video Hound's Golden Movie Retriever: The Complete Guide to Movies on Video Cassette and Laserdisc Detroit, Visible Ink; and, Leonard Maltin (1996) Leonard Maltin's 1996 Movie & Video Guide New York, Signet/Penguin.

popular fascination with the advertising process, and a remarkably consistent discourse on class mobility, lifestyle, and crises of creative conscience.

Existing analyses are generally disappointing; it is rare indeed that any such account recognizes that the main characters in these movies - and their respective dilemmas - are almost always *creative*.

Advertising Critics on Advertising Films

For Martin Davidson, author of *The Consumerist Manifesto: Advertising in postmodern times* (1992), "films like *The Hucksters* (1947) to *Crazy People* (1990) are so numerous they almost constitute a genre". He identifies ten of them, distinguishing between those that end with the main character "questing for dignity and idealism", and those few which reveal him to be "even more satanic than before he met his Mephistopheles" (1992:165). Davidson's main argument is that, while American TV at least has been relatively forgiving in its portrayal of advertising, Hollywood has been "the most relentless, systematic and vitriolic scourge of Madison Avenue" (*ibid*:164). This last point does not, however, hold up to closer inspection: the only two films in which the main character *doesn't* pull out of his "nose-dive into black disillusion" are British; all the others - along with their cheery redemption - are American productions. More confusing still is his simultaneous claim that the movies' 'attack' "has been remarkably consistent, on both sides of the Atlantic" (*ibid*:165). Similarly, television, which Davidson first exonerates from any accusation of rough treatment, also served up two 'vitriolic' pieces in the 1980s, according to his own evidence - and again, in Britain (Davidson 1992:166). The result of this oversight is that, contrary to the following assertion, his second-string argument as to the reason why film should be so critical of advertising carries just as much credibility as his first:

Perhaps there is a hint of displacement going on here, the transferral to another medium of Hollywood's own self-loathing? More likely an explanation for the short shrift that adland has consistently got from the movie-makers is that by attacking commercials and those who made them, Hollywood was in fact attacking the new competition from television. Attack being the best form of defence it clearly made sense to see off the new rival by rubbing our noses in

the banality and duplicity of the commercials that were television's *sine qua non* (*ibid*:164).

What *doesn't* make sense is that, if it was indeed the new threat from television which prompted this 'response' from the movies, why then has the 'attack' proceeded unabated, (and on occasion become viciously satirical) in the ensuing fifty years? Davidson recognizes the commonalities in plot ("Ad-films' central characters are invariably at the mercy of bosses who are irredeemably wed to the profit motive....Against these implacable tyrants, the central character inevitably comes face to face with the great vices of the advertising business" (1992:165)) but fails to notice that all these characters are creatives. Ultimately his critique becomes thinly-veiled opinion; the reason "we need to turn to a medium that in many ways parrots the views found in these films, but with much more portent" (i.e. 'the academic') is partly because "[n]ot many of the films...are much good as films" (*ibid*:167). Thus *How To Get Ahead in Advertising*, an 'explicitly political piece' (and a new extreme in advertising satire) fails because - for Davidson at least - it "quickly becomes clumsy, overdone and tiresome" (*ibid*).

Opinions of a different sort can be found in *Adcult USA*, James B. Twitchell's recent book about 'The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture'. The preface contains various references to the media environment in which Twitchell grew up. He delights in recounting ads ("Of the lasting things I learned growing up with the ads of David Ogilvy was a love of lists"); fiction and social theory - it doesn't seem to matter which is which ("As a teenager in the 1950s I read Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*, Sloan Wilson's *Man in the Grey [sic] Flannel Suit*, and, a little later, Wilson Brian [sic] Key's *Subliminal Seduction* and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*"); and - most glibly - films: "Although these books and their melancholy paranoia made the intellectual case for advertising, it was movies that clinched the deal" (1996:xi-xiii). In particular, Twitchell recalls the plot of the Doris Day/Rock Hudson vehicle *Lover Come Back* in fond detail; "[w]ho wouldn't want to go into advertising after such a story?" It is little surprise, then, that he presents his book as

a corrective to the sociology of 'outraged feminists and self-satisfied Marxists'. He has 'always loved' advertising, but refuses to 'defend' it (*ibid*:1) since, although it is *so* pervasive that it qualifies as "*the* central [cultural] institution" (*ibid*), "more than 99 percent of advertising does no 'work' " (*ibid*:3). His implicit approach might best be viewed as a kind of crypto-cultural studies, if only because it becomes clear that 'Adcult' - a Popcornesque neologism for popular/consumer culture - is conceived as the antithesis of 'Highcult'.

Twitchell later identifies a series of movies featuring various ad men 'up to no good'. Like Davidson, he isolates *The Hucksters* as a point of departure: for Davidson it 'sets the mould'; for Twitchell the original book, rather than the movie, is 'cauterizing'. The writers share similar observations about the portrayal of a cantankerous client, both commenting on the moment he spits on the boardroom table in order to demonstrate his idea of a 'memorable' message. For Twitchell, up until around 1970, movies which featured advertising ("*Take a Letter Darling, Marriage on the Rocks, The Way We Live Now, The Arrangement, Kiss Me Mate, A Letter to Three Wives, Madison Avenue, or The Wheeler Dealers*" 1996:235) often ended happily, although the *modus operandi* of these 'shifty rascals' was "deception and subversion" (*ibid*). Since then, with films such as "*How To Succeed[sic] in Advertising, Crazy People, Defending Your Life, Putney Swope, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, Nothing in Common, or The Coca-Cola Kid*, the tone is now invariably ironic" (*ibid*:238).

In fact, Twitchell's two groups of films overlap chronologically; I would also contend that the ironic intent of movies such as *Nothing in Common* is negligible. That we should also be asked to believe his assertion that the lead in *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* "has not been evil, just nuts", and that the client in *The Hucksters* "is the most glorious depiction of the wickedness of advertising ever to appear in popular culture" (*ibid*:238) casts further doubt on the value of the distinction he wishes to draw. Regardless, he joins Davidson in

noting the relatively innocuous treatment of advertising in television (at least in the U.S.), and suggests that various productions indicate "that our sympathies have softened" in the Nineties; "that ad execs-sellers are no longer a major villain" (*ibid*). His evidence?: re-runs of the mid-*Sixties* sitcom *Bewitched*; the quintessential *Eighties* melodrama *thirtysomething*; a 'dreary and short-lived' serialization of *Nothing in Common*; and, finally, the (relatively) current *Who's the Boss?* Even then, the significance of this last example apparently has more to do with role reversal (i.e. female careerist; male housekeeper): "only a woman can be an unambiguously 'good' executive in advertising" (*ibid*). In Twitchell's book there is little discussion of creativity; "[i]n fact, space buying is often far more creative than writing copy" (*ibid*:48).

For Stephen Fox, the social resonance of popular culture and advertising practices was clearly at its height in the 1950s, since this is the period reflected in the movies and books he chooses to discuss. For Fox too, "the mold for advertising fiction was set by Frederic Wakeman's hugely successful novel *The Hucksters*" (1984:201). In *The Mirror-Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators*, Fox discusses a dozen novels of the 1940s and 1950s which apparently attempted to capitalize on the popular reception of Wakeman's book. Indeed, it "had an incalculable impact on the public perception of advertising and sent many writers to their typewriters, hoping to imitate its success" (*ibid*:202).²

Fox's analysis is a thoughtful one, and, whereas Davidson and Twitchell leave one wondering precisely *why* they chose to discuss books and movies about advertising, Fox's comparison of the written texts - and the "business pressures and depersonalization stalking

²A more thorough inventory of fiction 'about' advertising is to be found in Richard Pollay, ed. and comp., (1979) *Information Sources in Advertising History* Westport, Greenwood Press. This includes works by Simone de Beauvoir (*Les Belles Images* 1968), J.B.Priestley (*Thirty-First of June* 1962; *Wonder Hero* 1933), and Dorothy L. Sayers. Sayers drew on her experience as an advertising copywriter in *Murder Must Advertise* (1933, reprinted 1967), which "works by indirection and drama to lead readers from the puzzle plot to reflection upon causes of spiritual crises in their society". Dawson Gaillard (1981) *Dorothy L. Sayers* New York, Frederick Ungar, p.64.

through" them - proves useful. All but two of the novels were written by men with experience in the media, either as radio or television writers, ad copywriters, an account handler, and even two agency vice-presidents. Three of them are also familiar as films, namely *The Hucksters*, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, and *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*.

For some of the lead characters, eventual moral regeneration is dependent on resignation; for those whose post-agency future is revealed, creative pursuits remain popular. My suggestion here (and this is a point overlooked by Fox, too) is that the creative compunction of both lead characters *and* novelists alike is reassessed, modified and personally perpetuated time and time again. This essential drive leads Mr. Blandings to supplement the fantasy life of his Dream House with a new career, running a local newspaper (in the sequel, entitled *Blandings' Way*). However, the promise of a life with integrity proves unattainable and his circumstance anticipates that of the lead in the film *I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name* (1967) in which a plan to escape to the sanctuary of a literary magazine are foiled. Both stories end with the main character being given his old advertising job back (the latter forcibly). In attempts to recuperate ad career and conscience, another alternative seems to be to move to a provincial agency.

Although the *process* of creation eludes film-makers and theorists alike, its side-effects provide script-writers with plenty to write about. The sheer effort of being original on demand is sometimes violent enough to trigger an avalanche of moral or ethical misgivings. As was revealed in the interviews in Chapter Two, for experienced creatives there is a distinct moment, beyond which the input or direction available through focus groups, for example, becomes a nuisance. Such interference in the process of invention (especially from outside the creative department) is seen as inimical to the quality of concepts which have been gestated, nurtured, and honed in relative isolation.

Judith Williamson has recently suggested that "[p]opular films always address - however indirectly - wishes, fears and anxieties current in society at any given moment" (1993:27). The central assertion being made here is that in films about advertising, such issues are addressed more directly - and critically - than we might at first imagine. In spite of the role of fantasy projections, flashbacks, glimpses of Utopia, and surreal twists, the films selected in research as having at least *some* relevance to this chapter can be claimed to be *realist*, i.e. their narratives are all set in the period, and the country, in which they were originally released. In addition, all involve relatively affluent, predominantly white, heterosexual, urban or suburban adults, whose lives are made extraordinary only by virtue of the events which unfold around them (and before us). The lead characters are three times as likely to be married as not; they only have functional families with young children up until 1970; and, the most likely scenario in the last ten years is that they are unmarried but dating, followed by married without kids. In 1985 the (Australian) kids were older teenagers, and in 1990 and 1991 the (American) hero was a divorcee.

The 1970s and the late 1980s have proved to be the least productive periods, with 1971-1981 and 1986-1993 seeing just three films produced apiece. In contrast, the busiest decades were the 1960s and 1980s (12 and 11 films respectively), peaking in the late 1960s (1967-1970: 8 films) and mid 1980s (1983-1986: 8 films). Substantial satirical content has been relatively rare, figuring briefly in the late 1960s (3 films), the mid-to-late 1980s (2 films) and once in 1994; the only three US-made satires were released in 1969 (2) and 1994 - two of which were produced and directed by African-Americans.

Based on these assertions, this section concerns the analysis of around thirty English-language films spanning the last fifty years, each of which has been identified as having a narrative which incorporates or addresses advertising in a *sustained* and *explicit* manner. The questions that Johnson would wish to raise are: "What are the recurrent patterns here? What forms can we abstract from these texts most commonly?" (1986/87:60). Accordingly,

the dilemmas confronting the characters in each movie are categorized in the following manner: (i) the problems encountered in terms of the role and workings of the advertising agency as a business institution; (ii) the place of advertising in a society increasingly predicated on the individuated consumer; and (iii) the plight of the creative individual in this conundrum. These 'filmic fictions' are treated as 'historically produced constructions' to be 'read' in a 'non-evaluative' manner (Johnson 1986/87:74).

Johnson is adamant that a

main requirement is that analysts abandon, once and for all, the two main models of the 'critical' reader: the primarily evaluative reading ('Is this a good/bad text?') and the aspiration to text analysis as an objective science. Both prevent us really relativizing our own reading and therefore learning from it more fully. 'Scientific' readings remove from our conscious consideration the common-sense knowledge we all possess of the larger cultural contexts within which meanings are produced. They hide away our very real social involvement in the meanings, involvement which is active nonetheless (Johnson 1986:306).

The aim, therefore, has been to work against the separation between critic and reader, or critic and producer. Of course, the result can never be entirely objective; in this case it is inevitably contingent on my own experience as ad creative, consumer, and academic (and, according to Johnson's argument, more useful for it). Although the basic plot of each film may be briefly outlined, they do not necessarily appear in chronological order (see Appendices 2. and 3.), and are discussed only in as much as they have significance for the arguments presented.

Films about Advertising 1947-1994: A case study

The most striking question at this stage is: why should advertising have been used so frequently as a touchstone for the exploration of critical issues? Given the fact that in terms of employment figures at least, the business is thoroughly insignificant, we can only surmise that this highly glamorized commercial process holds some larger analogous or metaphorical significance for filmmakers and audiences (though perhaps for different

reasons). How else can we account for an average of around one major, English-language, feature release every eighteen months since *The Hucksters* appeared in 1947?³ This, too, is aside from foreign-language films, the avant-garde, failed or minor releases, and even incomplete projects.⁴

Many of the films discussed here - particularly the comedies - are not so much critical explorations as fairly routine excursions through middle-class, suburban lives. The ad-man is the ultimate eccentric-conformist: a figurehead whose presence allows issues of infidelity, hedonism, and even the carnivalesque, to be explored in a manner which never really threatens the basic assumptions or mores of a 'mass' society. He is at once refreshingly outlandish, yet comfortingly familiar; a personified invitation to identify with the advertised world habitually painted by his real-life counterparts. Sometimes the difficulty of cramming these two polar-opposites into the same character make for rather anomalous cinema: the title character in *Good Neighbor Sam* (1964 US) is not just a confirmed neo-suburbanite with a wife, two children, and an advertising job in the city; his real passion lies in designing and making huge kinetic sculptures out of 'found objects' - one of them sits, rather incongruously, on the back lawn, amongst the sunbeds and trimmed borders.

i) Gray Flannel Films: The post-war advertising industry in the movies

Uncertain Beginnings

Early films about advertising are intriguing for the way in which they portray the immediate post-war period as a time of great change - for business *and* society. While the uncertain

³Prior to 1947, there was also a steady stream of advertising-related movies, including *The Easiest Way* (1931 US); *Thunder in the City* (1937 US); *Turnabout* (1940 US); *Take a Letter Darling*, a.k.a. *Green-Eyed Woman* (1942 US); and *Her Husband's Affairs* (1947 US). Apart from being outside the designated period under research, many of these titles were precluded from analysis due to the difficulty of finding copies of the films on video.

⁴For example, the very popular West German film *Maenner...* (1985), directed by Doris Dorrie, and released with English subtitles as *Men...*; *The Icicle Thief* (1989 Italian); and *Sweet Movie* (1974 Fr./Can.) a highly controversial film written and directed by Dusan Makavejev. His later release *The Coca-Cola Kid* (1985 Aus.) is much more well-known, but clearly lacks the critical or satirical bite of his earlier 'underground' efforts.

hopes of economic prosperity helped to define the times, films such as *The Hucksters* (1947 US) and *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit* (1956 US) also served to provide a promotional boost to the resurgent American Way of Life. Both movies work as middle-class morality tales in which the competing responsibilities of business and family must be re-evaluated and balanced. Mirroring the work of writers such as David Riesman, both are highly involved dramas in which life in the 'gray flannel jungle' becomes a search for an ethical approach; a way to 'do the right thing' while keeping one eye on the all-important salary (this being the most direct assurance of a comfortable lifestyle, and, in tandem, an incontrovertible class-marker). The lead character in each movie must adjust to the demands of a demilitarized civilian life, and this experience is explored in lengthy flashbacks in *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit* (hereafter *The Man...*).

In *The Hucksters*, Clark Gable plays Vic Norman, a 'hep character' with a pencil moustache and a sharp suit, who returns to New York in search of work after the War. His unconventional methods and self-confident manner land him a job with an agency - Kimberley Advertising - who's largest client is somewhat of a despot. Although Norman initially wins him over, he is finally driven to discover his own ethical threshold. This, in combination with a comparable personal epiphany, provokes Norman to lambaste the sponsor, after which he walks out. With his new-found personal integrity still intact, he looks forward to an uncertain future with the beautiful English war-widow he has also won over.

The narrative provides some fascinating insights into the relationship between commercial radio, its sponsors and agents, and is also clearly a critique of the power inequities which prevailed in this arrangement. The sponsor - the agency's client - produces soap bars, and one of their collaborative promotional methods involves an ongoing radio saga heavily endorsed by Beautee Soap (hence the term 'soap opera': "Oh Mr. Norman, you'd better listen - this is the day the hero loses his leg"). Seeing advertising's task as a matter of

repetition beyond the point of irritation, the sponsor is pointedly at odds with Norman - although the agency he represents has long ago given up the fight. In a memo he dictates to the head of his agency, Kimberley Advertising, Norman explains his position:

For four years I haven't been listening to the radio much...in that time it's gotten worse, if possible....we've sung to them, screamed at them, we've insulted them, cheated them, and then angered them; turned their homes into a combination grocery store, crap game, and Midway....some day 50 million people are just going to reach out and turn off their radios."⁵

Although these concerns are expressed in terms of the audience's interests as inhabitants of 'radioland', it is clear that the story is implicitly an attempt to further legitimate ad agencies, since wresting creative control from the client/sponsor is framed as an act of public-spiritedness: "[u]nfortunately what the public wants has nothing to do with radio - it's what the sponsor wants that counts".

One of the trio of vignettes which make up *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949 US) deserves comparison. A single woman, known to all the characters (who narrates the story but is never seen), has written a letter in which she reveals that she has run off with one of their husbands - but purposely omits to tell them which one. Having received the missive on the dockside, the three wives reluctantly embark on a previously-arranged day-trip down the river, during which all three reflect - via flashback - on their relationships with their husbands, and the fact that each has a reason to suspect that she might have been the victim.

Over all, this film is a consummate study in class, social climbing, taste, and money, all of which are discussed; all of which are somehow embodied in the intertwined lives of the three marriages, from the ex-Services couple (she, a country girl who feels belittled and alienated by the refined social mores of her husband's friends; he, the man who already has 'money and class'); to the coarse sparring of a blunt older businessman and his young but manipulative wife; to the social-climbing radio writer and her morally superior school-

⁵Where published film-scripts were available, full references have been provided. However, in many cases, the dialogue has been transcribed directly from the films themselves.

teacher husband. This last relationship is particularly relevant to the discussion in hand because of the tensions between Rita and George (Kirk Douglas).

Rita's flashback, during a stop-over picnic, revolves around a dinner to which her ad agency employer (the portly Mrs. Manley, with mousy, sycophantic husband in tow) has been invited. Having suffered their pompous behavior all evening - including being obliged to listen to two solid hours of vacuous commercial radio - George realizes the opportunity to vent his frustrations in a tirade which starts where Vic Norman's indictment in *The Hucksters* leaves off. According to one source, this 'big' speech "is often deleted by TV stations to this day so that advertisers might not be offended" (Nash & Ross 1985/87). George has just been reproached by Rita's boss for not knowing the name of a successful radio writer - who's 'bilge' he has just been subjected to - and he can no longer contain himself:

Mrs.Manley: Radio writing is the literature of today; the literature of the masses.

George: Then heaven help the masses....The purpose of radio writing, as far as I can see, is to prove to the masses that a deodorant can bring happiness, a mouthwash guarantee success, and a laxative attract romance....

Don't think, says the radio, and we'll pay you for it. Can't spell 'cat'? Too bad! - but a yacht and a million dollars to the gentleman for being in our audience tonight!

Worry, says the radio. Will your best friends not tell you? Will you lose your teeth? Will your cigarettes give you cancer? Will your body function after you're thirty-five? If you don't use our product you'll lose your husband, your job, and die! Use our product and we'll make you rich, we'll make you famous!

George can clearly go much further than Vic Norman in his criticism, since his job does not personally implicate him in the 'religion' of radio. His speech leaves him physically and metaphorically isolated: even as he addresses the assembled guests from the middle of his living room floor, his wife is cringingly shepherding them to the door. George is under no illusions as to why this should be, as he tells his wife later: "I'm willing to admit that to a majority of my fellow citizens I'm a slightly comic figure: an educated man....I'm a school teacher; that's even worse than being an intellectual". (Since the observations of writers

such as Riesman, Mills, and Galbraith have such an uncanny resonance with many of the themes explored in these early films, we might conclude that the class about whom they wrote - and to which they belonged - was actually uncomfortable with such astute analysis, and thus chose to view their observations as risible.)

George's integrity and altruism stand in stark contrast to his wife's declared ambitions; while teachers are "often cold and hungry in this richest land on earth", the 'drooling pap' of commercial radio has turned his wife's 'independence' into 'fear': "when I watched you snivel and grovel around those two walking commercials, I didn't like it....I want my own wife back". Seeing 'radio sponsors' and 'comic strips' as a poor substitute for the "real glories of the human spirit, past and present" with which he aspires to 'open the minds and hearts' of 'the kids', George likens such commerce to an alien, and specifically un-American insurgence: he wishes to return to a time when "we thought the same thing about everything. From baseball to Brahms".

While *The Man...* is also the product of a time when there were huge increases in the number of clerical, or white collar, positions - which came to define the starched conformity and anonymity of a 'gray' life in business, it illustrates the relative colour of a career in advertising. Tom Rath, played by Gregory Peck, is under no illusions when he says "I didn't want to get into this rat-race, but now that I'm in it I think I'd be an idiot not to play it the same way everybody else plays it". However, his new job is far from ordinary. From the moment his interviewer, lying supine behind his desk, asks that he write his autobiography in sixty minutes - replete with the line 'the most significant thing about me is...' - we begin to understand that the demands, and potential rewards, of a career in advertising are unusual, if not extraordinary. They are also mystical: when Rath protests that "I don't know anything about public relations", the man who has tipped him off about the job replies "who does?".

Rath must ghost-write a speech for the president of UBC Public Relations, to help him persuade the attendees at a medical conference that they should endorse a promotional initiative for mental health. (Interestingly, the difficulty of the task is underlined when we learn that this is an expressly discerning and perceptive audience - as opposed to any 'mass'.) As he becomes aware of the petty politicking going on around him in the organization, he is faced with a crisis of conscience made all the more critical by his grave financial difficulties at home. He faces extraordinary pressure from his wife, who, acting as his conscience, warns him "not to turn into a cheap, slippery yes-man"; after all, she adds, "for a *decent* man there's never any peace of mind without honesty".

For the most part however, early films about advertising reflect the rapidly evolving nature of promotional bureaucracies. Besides, personal dilemmas are not *so* traumatic as to be unmanageable, and their resolution is paralleled by a clear need for *business* to move forward in its responsibilities (and pretensions). In *The Hucksters*, creative control must be wrested from the sponsors, for the sake of radio's audience; in *A Letter to Three Wives*, the masses must be saved from the educative pretensions of advertisers and commercial radio. Meanwhile, as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* discovers that the 'rat-race' can afford him the luxury of choosing to be a '9 to 5 guy' for the sake of his family, business is shown to have the capacity to be a humanistic affair, although this orientation is by no means assured.

Alternative business styles play off against one another in *Lover Come Back* (1961 US), in which an 'old-school' agency competes with a rather gung-ho outfit across the Avenue. Although the latter mistakenly releases a series of test ads devoid of a corresponding product, the chutzpah of the playboy creative head (Rock Hudson) has them choosing to continue the ads while they go about inventing a product to fit the campaign. The client is a pliable old soak, and he also heralds the slow demise of the tyrannical moguls whose autocratic behaviour often provides dramatic tension in these early films.

Shifting Loyalties

The thoroughly unpleasant - and portly - sponsor in *The Hucksters* was apparently modelled on George Washington Hill, with whom Frederic Wakeman, the author of the original book, had to deal during his time as an ad man at Foote, Cone & Belding (Fox 1984:201). The rotund client in *Good Neighbor Sam* (1964), played by Edward G. Robinson, carries the same cantankerous potential, chewing out the agency for its staff's debauched behaviour. However, as Vic Norman had once hoped, creative control now lies with the agency: Robinson, as the owner of Nurdlinger Farms, must turn to Sam Bissell (Jack Lemmon) as the last 'clean-living family man' left in Burke & Hare - and therefore the only person suitable to create his new advertising campaign.

Thus, over time, we have seen a change in the identity of the lead character's *bête noire*: sponsors are superseded by clients, who are then replaced by bad-tempered agency bosses. Similarly, the relative creative finesse of the task of promotion has transformed, from the instrumental overtones of soap operas heavily influenced by the sponsor's personal input, to the slick theatricality of pitching ideas to a pensive client (see for example *Nothing in Common*).

Although, once more, a fiery client appears in *Nothing in Common* to push Tom Hanks' character over the edge, it is the unmoved taskmaster of the *agency* who, at one time or another, goes head to head with the lead man in *I'll Never Forget What's 'isname* (1967 UK); *Kramer v. Kramer* (1979 US); *Agency* (1981); *How to Get Ahead...* (1989); *Crazy People* (1990); and *Boomerang* (1992). A possible interpretation of this shift in dramatic or comedic focus is that, as advertising has become established as an important and familiar institution in its own right, so too the emphasis has settled on the dilemmas to be found *within* such organizations - without the need to reference more recognizable entities such as radio or big business (represented by big businessmen).

Honest, Decent and True

The need for honesty is inevitably an issue in many films 'about' advertising. In 1947, it was merely a personal credo, as *The Huckster's* girlfriend points out: "Vic you're too good for that. Why don't you sell things you believe in, and sell them with dignity and taste? That's a career for any man; a career to be proud of. What's wrong with that?". By 1954 advertising has also been held accountable for holding up the false promise of individualism and celebrity (*It Should Happen To You* US). Although in 1981 the ultimate integrity of commerce was the focus of concern (*Agency* US), it is the addressing of issues of representation which permeate 1969's *Putney Swope* (US).

That radio in particular was originally treated as a medium of manipulation can be illustrated using the following exchange from *A Letter to Three Wives*. Rather than fearing the apathy of put-upon listeners (as had Vic Norman), Mrs. Manley, the advertising mogul, has absolute faith in the 'power' of radio soap operas - "they have a great influence over housewives" - and even Rita and George's housekeeper: "Sadie may not realize it but whether or not she thinks she's listening, she's being penetrated, and after penetration comes saturation, and when she's saturated she'll find herself saying 'Madam, I suggest that you buy our washing machine at Hollingsway's' ".

An early scene in *Mr. Blandings...* provides an opportunity to explore some principled objections to advertising. Since these are delivered at the breakfast table by two precocious young daughters - who are clearly repeating *verbatim* what they've been told at school by their 'progressive' (female) teacher - the criticisms are robbed of any authority (and easily dismissed). Thus "Miss Stallewagon says advertising is a basically parasitic profession"; "Miss Stallewagon says advertising makes people who can't afford it, buy things they don't want with money they haven't got!". In this scenario, the comments can be ridiculed and cleared from the table by Jim Blandings, head of the household and advertising everyman: "perhaps I *should* quit this 'basically parasitic profession' which at this very

moment is paying for your *fancy* tuition, *and* those extra French lessons, *and* that progressive summer camp, *and* the very braces on your back teeth!"

The most damning public condemnation of the business as a manipulative and disreputable institution surrounded the heated debate over subliminal advertising⁶ (i.e. the alleged insemination of 'hidden' messages in ads). Vance Packard had already provoked a ground swell of popular suspicion with his seminal work *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), yet Wilson Bryan Key's two books *Subliminal Seduction* (1974) and *Media Sexploitation* (1977) took the argument much further. The North American film industry's response emerged in 1981 as a thriller called *Agency*, which took the surreptitious placement of subliminal *political* messages in an agency's regular output as its point of dramatic departure. Nothing before, or since, has matched this largely unproved advertising phenomenon⁷ for the degree of indignation and sensationalism it drew from academics and the public.

The Emergence of a Genre

Genre allows for the handling of often very difficult or disturbing themes within reliably familiar formulae....The highly structured formats...offer ways of speaking about the concerns of a society while producing pleasure.

Williamson (1993:28,32)

Richard Slotkin suggests that genre "has to do with the continuity of forms: the persistence from generation to generation of particular ways of telling stories, making symbols, structuring systems of representation"⁸. More recent films echo many of the established themes, although the function - and limitations - of the advertising agencies becomes better

⁶It is sometimes argued that product placement in the movies is a *form* of subliminal advertising in that references to brand names can be insinuated into plot lines or physically placed - often unobtrusively, but *repeatedly* - in-camera. See Miller (1990) on these points.

⁷A startling example can be found in Stuart Ewen (1988) *All Consuming Images* New York, Basic Books, p.48. Twitchell (1996) makes great play of more recent mainstream campaigns which have been designed to lampoon the 'sex-in-the-ice-cubes' debacle (1996:112-115).

⁸Richard Slotkin (1984) 'Prologue to a Study of Myth and Genre in American Movies' PROSPECTS: The Annual of American Cultural Studies 9, p.407.

defined. The stock images of tall office buildings; sophisticated reception areas revealing a bustling hive of activity; boardroom intrigue; creative tiffs; hiring and firing; desperate late-night searches for inspiration; client presentations; and even *elevator* scenes, are then replayed again and again so as to become celluloid signifiers for the peculiar business of promotion. Over this familiar framework other issues which occupy the times have then been explored, such as race relations (*Putney Swope* 1969 US); 'women's lib' (*Kramer v. Kramer* 1979 US); subliminal advertising (*Agency* 1981 US); yuppie angst (*Lost in America* 1985 US); or heavenly redemption (*Bliss* 1985 Aus., and *Defending Your Life* 1991 US).

For example, the title character of *Putney Swope* is the new, black chairman of an ad agency, elected to the position by mistake. He promptly fires every white person in the company bar one (henceforth the token Caucasian), their tobacco, alcohol, and war-toy clients, and renames the company Truth & Soul Inc.. The spoof ads which intersperse the ensuing action pre-empt the similarly whacky and 'truthful' lampoons to be found in *Crazy People* - in which, as with *Lover Come Back*, they are initially aired by mistake. In the case of *Crazy People* they are the work of a weary copywriter attempting to 'tell it like it is'; in *Lover Come Back* an amorous creative promises publicity to a dancer who has threatened to testify to his malpractice; he bribes her using a spurious photo shoot - she thinks she's starring in a new ad campaign while the photographer thinks he's just doing test shots.

In recent films, with the genre now established, attention shifts to the agency *per se*; the institution becomes progressively more deeply implicated; and the corresponding dilemma of the advertising creative becomes all the more desperate. In all, three movies since 1985, and two made in the late 1960s, are largely concerned with the mental breakdown of the main character - who is a white male ad creative.

ii) The New Consumer Society on Celluloid

Learning To Consume

Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948 US) and *Lover Come Back* (1961 US) provide correspondingly humorous invocations of many already-familiar themes. Both films begin with similar shots of Manhattan (skyline; looming towers; busy streets) accompanied by a booming, authoritative voice-over. Again, the crowded avenues and trains convey the impression that, as the commentary in *Mr. Blandings...* suggests: "[i]n any discussion of contemporary America and how its people live, we must inevitably start with Manhattan, New York City, USA". The ultimately tongue-in-cheek monologue informs us that 'this great metropolis' is a "glistening modern giant of concrete and steel, reaching to the heavens and cradling in its arms seven millions - *seven millions!*". The voice-over for *Lover Come Back* adds detail to a very similar vision: "[t]his is Madison Avenue: nerve center of the advertising world. Here in these steel and concrete beehives are born the ideas that decide what we the public will eat, drink, drive, and smoke. And how we will dress, sleep, shave, and smell".

In *Lover Come Back*, the lifestyles of two bright, young 'go-getters' are an extension of their attitudes to work. Carol Templeton (Doris Day) is an archetypal 'worker' while Jerry Webster (Rock Hudson) is a 'drone'. In order to arrive promptly for work she takes a taxi, and exudes an air of conscientiousness; Webster is delivered to his office by a girlfriend in an open top sports-car, still wearing his dinner jacket from the previous evening's revelry. These two attitudes become emblematic for the different business styles of their respective agencies, which are then played out in an ensuing battle for the same new business accounts.

As comedies, both films' concern for the deeper ethical or moral shortcomings of modern business is somewhat superficial. However, as illustrative examples of the pursuit of happiness - and of conspicuously constructed lifestyles - they are very informative. Salary

is often discussed in *Mr. Blandings...* (as it is in *The Hucksters* and *The Man...*). Relative worth is also measured in terms of career development and home ownership, especially in *Mr. Blandings...* (and *The Man...*), and the former can be seen as a highly prescient illustration of the emergent consumer mindset. It is the very uniformity of a modern city crowd which provides for the story of an exception who proves the rule: "Jim and Muriel Blandings are just like thousands of other New Yorkers - modern cliff-dwellers"; "[Jim's] as typical a New Yorker as you'll ever meet - at least he was".

Faced with life in a demonstrably cramped apartment, which must apparently accommodate the four of them *and* their black maid, the ensuing comedy concerns the pursuit of a 'dream house' in Connecticut. The running gag pertains to the accumulating costs of the project: a shrunken plot of land; an original house which must ultimately be demolished; a hidden mortgage which must be settled; ever-escalating builders' fees; and too little, or too much, ground water. All are received with a stunned double-take from Jim: "*How much?*". He appears naive (yet lovable) in his every action, or so we are reminded by his ever-present, sarcastic lawyer. Ultimately, the dream-house is completed, an elusive advertising slogan is conceived in the nick of time, and - crucially - the lawyer capitulates. As the voice of authority and reason (it is he who introduces and narrates the story) his final comment sums up, and excuses, the whole disastrous venture: "maybe there *are* some things you should buy with your heart and not your head; maybe *those* are the things that really count". As a moral coda, it is also a timely invitation to an audience of prototypical consumers.

In the opening scenes of *The Man...*, the evening commute back to Connecticut ends with a ride home from the railway station. Tom's wife informs him that the washing machine has broken down and is beyond repair; the mention of the price of a new one causes raised eyebrows. However, this is only symptomatic of his wife's exasperation with their house, which she loathes. Happiness depends on a move to an inherited property which, though grandiose, is unfashionably old.

Films as 'Social Tableaux'

The film comedies and dramas of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s are basically aspirational tales: even if salary expectations have not been met by the final curtain, the *promise* of better fortune more than compensates. A refreshed or refined personal ethos; a dream (house) realized; true love: these are the ingredients for a brighter future - and a happy ending. The 'scarcity psychology' that David Riesman has associated with the transitional, inner-directed social character (which barely prevails in *The Hucksters*, *Mr. Blandings...*, and *The Man...*) is finally eclipsed altogether by his other-directed 'abundance psychology'.

This imperative of "'wasteful' luxury consumption of leisure and of the surplus product" (Riesman 1964:18) pervades the decadent clowning of *I Married A Woman* (1958 US), *Lover Come Back* (1961 US), *The Thrill Of It All!* (1963 US), *Good Neighbor Sam* (1964 US) and *Marriage On The Rocks* (1965 US). These energetic - if repetitive - romantic comedies, mainly from the early Sixties, possess a sense of delirious optimism about life in a new consumer society which remains unchecked until the eve of the 1970s. Much of the visual content in these movies consists in a continuous parade of desirable objects, from open-top sports cars and a bright new suburbia, through Doris Day's numerous costume and jewellery changes, to the leading women themselves. To illustrate: in *I Married A Woman*, the nerdy - and lovable - Mickey Briggs (George Gobel) is an ad creative who's 'trophy' wife (Doris Day) had been the promo girl for the beer he advertises. The lesson for the consumer - akin to Roland Marchand's 'parable of the democracy of goods' (1985:217) - is clear, as Briggs reminds us in the opening scene: "this story could happen anywhere, at any time - but only if you married a woman...and I married a *woman*" (hardly an unusual qualification).

In these respects, such films can be likened to 'social tableaux', a term Marchand uses to describe pre-war advertisements "in which persons [and products] are depicted in such a

way as to suggest their relationships to each other or to a larger social structure" (1985:165). Thus movies, too, "depict and describe the material artifacts available for purchase at a given time...the state of technology, the current styles in clothing, furniture, and other products" (*ibid*).

The Parable of The Unworldly Wife

According to many of the narratives, women were vulnerable members of the emergent consumer society. The stay-at-home wives of *Mr. Blandings...*, *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit*, *Good Neighbor Sam*, *Putney Swope*, and *The Arrangement* clearly rely on their husbands' careers to provide them with material comforts and financial security, while in *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* at least, Mrs. Dennis Bagley works at home as an interior designer. Importantly, their collective naïveté remains unexploited, whereas the women in *A Letter To Three Wives* (1949 US), *It Should Happen To You* (1954 US), *The Thrill Of It All!* (1963 US), and *Bliss* (1985 Aus.) venture into, and ultimately fall foul of, the business of promotion.

Beguiled by the promise of celebrity and the lure of an inordinate income, the wife of an obstetrician becomes a 'promo girl' for Happy Soap in *The Thrill Of It All!*. The girlfriend of a documentary film-maker in *It Should Happen To You* simply wants to see her own name on a billboard - with similar results (this time for Adams Soap and Kwik-Slim). Both are mobbed for their autographs, the former in a restaurant and the latter in Macy's department store - much to the chagrin of their upstaged, professional beaux.

The radio-writing job of a woman married to an ethically-minded teacher in *A Letter To Three Wives* is never treated as anything more than a sham. Just as radio's audience is being duped, so too is she; ultimately the wife sees her husband's point and, in dismissing the pretensions of her job, delivers a decisive rebuff to the agency curmudgeon. The burning ambition of the agency boss's wife in *Bliss* turns to disaster as she attempts to eclipse her husband's modest success. Most telling is the final salvation of Gladys Glover

(Judy Holliday) in *It Should Happen To You*, who is encouraged by her principled boyfriend (Jack Lemmon) to realize that being 'one of the crowd' is more important than being famous. The ad agency which exploited her clearly understood this point, billing her as 'the average American girl' in its soap campaign. The same logic of using 'real people' in ads - to 'strip away the sham and pretension from advertising'⁹ - results in the 'clean-living' title character of *Good Neighbor Sam* (Jack Lemmon, again) being featured in the campaign he invented (alongside a woman who is clearly not his wife). A capsule review (Nash & Ross 1985/87) of the comedy *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957 US) explains this notion via the lead character, whose ego has got the better of him: "he finally comes to his senses as he understands that he's been a success all along and that all average guys are successes because it is they that the advertisers and agencies always cater to and attempt to please".

Conversely, the principled objections to advertising raised early on in *Mr. Blandings...* are delivered by two young daughters in the presence of father, mother, and maid. Having been set up like a house of cards, they are summarily - and wittily - demolished by the man-of-the-house. Either way, to be female is to be wrong, or fooled; it is no coincidence that the vast majority of films identified here feature a male ad-writer, who often demonstrates chauvinist or sexist attitudes (which are themselves perpetuated and propagated through ads and films alike, as the following very recent examples illustrate).

Patriarch Knows Best

In *How to Get Ahead...*, Bagley (I and II) habitually taunts one of his wife's friends, who, in turn, attacks him (Robinson 1989:136-7):

Penny: Do you really think I don't understand? You dislike me, because I'm not one of those starved little tarts you exploit. I don't rush out to buy your latest make up. I have a mind of my own, and I have a body of my own, that doesn't fit into the preconceived patterns men like you dictate.

⁹This approach has been used again and again, most recently in The Bank of Montreal's 'Signs of the Times' TV advertising campaign (see Anne Kingston (1996) 'Banking on Anxiety' The Globe and Mail Report on Business Magazine June.

Bagley: You mean you're fat.

Ted Kramer (Dustin Hoffman) immediately suspects that his wife's sudden departure has been a 'women's lib' conspiracy involving a female neighbour. Eddie Murphy's character sleeps with a number of women during the course of *Boomerang*, only to reject all but one of them the morning after, because their *feet* have failed to please him. In *Bliss*, Harry Joy thinks nothing of summoning a prostitute half his age to his hotel room, even as he self-righteously condemns his biggest client for making carcinogenic products. Tom Hanks' character in *Nothing in Common* bonds with his estranged parents by buying his mother a puppy and his father some pornographic magazines.

Ad films have been resolutely sexist in their orientation, despite the apparently - and earnestly - progressive intentions of a few. While there is much to learn in them about advertising and creativity, they *all* leave much to be desired as potential critiques of patriarchal authority.

(Black) Ring Around The (White) Collar

As has already been illustrated, most of the films which refuse to exonerate the consumer culture they portray are non-American productions. An exception is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the first 'above-ground' or commercial work of a Black underground director, Robert Downey. *Putney Swope* (1969 US) presented a rare challenge to the white - even WASPy - advertising patriarchy of the movies. Although Eddie Murphy's *Boomerang* might conceivably bear comparison, it falls short of any kind of political statement about the problems of race *or* advertising, merely taking *Swope's* initial conceit (an ad agency entirely staffed by African-Americans) and rendering the story in as conservative a fashion as *The Cosby Show* ¹⁰.

¹⁰See Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis (1992) Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences and the Myth of the American Dream Boulder, Westview Press. Their argument, based on audience research, suggests that the 'positive' portrayal of an upper-middle class, Black family actually serves to perpetuate social and economic stigmatization of the vast majority of African-Americans. For Jhally & Lewis it fuels arguments for the removal of such programs as affirmative action; the most alarming

The eventual emergence of advertising messages which actually addressed blacks as potential consumers (while still insisting on employing such flagrant stereotypes as the 'mammy' or the faithful manservant) has been attributed to the continuing legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, *and* the economic pressure on corporate America to find new markets to keep pace with its production capacity (Lears 1994:258). The prospect of a black insurgence in Madison Avenue presented a fictionalized but clearly relevant challenge to advertising's orthodoxy. Indeed *Putney Swope* was a "phenomenal success" in New York¹¹. Downey's anarchic - and erratic - style of presentation allowed many critics to dismiss a film which placed political comment and satirical venom above any requisite Hollywood veneer. Its flaws are numerous by contemporary standards - being peppered with homophobic and anti-Semitic comments, and awash with profoundly sexist images - but as a period comment on advertising it is indispensable. It is a rare occasion indeed when a perpetually disenfranchised group, rendered invisible by advertising, has the opportunity to speak in a very public - and very critical - manner.

The oeuvre of writer/director/producer Spike Lee, a hugely successful African-American film-maker with a reputation for confrontation (in both his choice of subject matter, and his adversarial relationship with the news and entertainment media) was recently associated with another rare, satirical film about advertising. *DROP Squad* (1994 US) tells the story of a Black ad man who becomes the target of a gang of vigilante 'deprogrammers', whose aim is to make him recognize the dubious racial overtones of the work he produces for his agency. He has *doubly* sold-out: not only is he ensconced in the (Caucasian) advertising industry, his Black consciousness has also been radically compromised.

The ad industry had previously been implicated in a conflict with Hollywood which Lears has recently described as 'ethnocultural' (1994:329): it was not so much that advertising

and reactionary attitude is that those Blacks still living on, or below, the poverty-line have only themselves to blame.

¹¹ Arthur Knight (1969) 'Putney Swope' *filmfacts XII*, 16.

personnel were being portrayed in the movies in a sensationalized fashion, as the fact that Madison Avenue was an overwhelmingly Protestant preserve, set against the preponderance of Jewish film-makers on the other side of the country. In the 1930s, "[t]he young WASP executives at JWT, for example, returned from the West Coast smirking about their sojourn among 'the semitic tribes'. It was as if Jewish moviemakers reminded admakers of their common peddler past; anti-Semitic reflexes were intertwined with the desire to distance national advertising from its disreputable origins" (*ibid*). Based on Lears' and Downey's accounts, the identity of advertising personnel, and especially creatives, appeared to be beyond doubt.

Revolt of the Perfect Consumers

Ad creatives have been conceptualized as vanguard or 'perfect' consumers (Featherstone 1991); a 'taste culture' whose members can be characterized as voracious and highly selective consumers, capable of some of the most sophisticated readings of popular cultural artifacts (if not through ads, then through style magazines, films, music and TV - all the work of similarly inclined 'cultural intermediaries'). It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that they should lead the revolt against a regime which they themselves have served to perpetuate.

The more recent the rendition of the advertising story, the more embellished the lives portrayed. The ad man's dream house is often a fabulous affair, reaching giddy proportions in *The Arrangement* (1969 US) and *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* (1989 UK), and the inventory of consumable accoutrements gets longer and longer. Surrounded by such material wealth, it is little wonder that these conspicuous possessions finally become the specific target of a creative's destructive paranoia, in *How to Get Ahead...*:

Julia: Jesus Christ! What do you think you are doing?

Bagley: I'm completing a process of natural selection. I'm going through everything in the house and isolating items of genuine worth. All other products, and especially those contaminated with advertising, I am disposing of. That includes all canned and frozen foods, detergents, aerosols, certain electrical goods and your make up....I'm gonna do those bastard television sets in here.

Julia: Like you're doing the vacuum cleaner?

Bagley: That's right. Except I'm gonna do them better. I'm gonna turn them on, and do them in the middle of an advertisement for themselves. I'm going to drown them (Robinson 1989:140-143).

'Natural' selection comes to a logical and literal conclusion in *Bliss* (1985) as the entire, hellish modern world is abandoned, and our hero takes to a life in the forest.

Although Eddie Anderson (Kirk Douglas) is constantly surrounded by the sumptuous evidence of his immense success as an ad man, he can no longer enjoy *The Arrangement* (1969 US): in spite of the fabulous advertising job, mistress, and accepting wife, he attempts suicide. His convalescence is haunted by the very same things that were designed to give him pleasure: in a surreal moment, as he recuperates in his palatial garden, the pool-side chairs mockingly turn their backs on him as we learn that he had foiled his own plan to kill himself. At the very moment he purposely drove his open-top car under a moving articulated lorry, he instinctively ducked.

iii) Creative Angst Hits The Big Screen

Defining a New Career

The archetypal demands placed on 'commercial artists' (an admittedly outdated term, but one which actually makes plain the contradiction which their role embodies) are at the core of many films about advertising. Creativity is, after all, the aspect of advertising that we can most clearly appreciate - or *dislike the least*. Ingenuity, originality, wit, or craft, and, ultimately, the capacity to entertain: these are the qualities which make the advertising creative on celluloid a character about whom we might care. Vic Norman, in *The Hucksters*, attempts to win creative control from the sponsor on behalf of his agency - and apparently in the interests of the listening public. He refuses to have his script for a new radio show vetted by the sponsor, preferring to present the completed recording at an

emergency Sunday meeting. Rather than simply being an 'ideas man', Norman is something of a 'Mr.Fix-it', flying to Hollywood to negotiate contracts for the actors he recruits. The more delineated role of the creative becomes a little more recognizable in *Mr.Blandings...*, in which the lead's sole task is to create a new slogan for Wham! ham. Originality is now a prerequisite since, as Norman has by now noted, their trademark until now has been 'corny sales talk' and the "spelling out of words as if no-one in the audience had gotten past the first grade".

After another overnight brainstorming session at the office, Jim Blandings sighs "[i]t's gone! I've lost my touch". However, when his maid sweeps into his sitting room and declares "[i]f you ain't eating Wham!, you ain't eating ham", it is only Jim, amongst the assembled throng, who spots its potential as an ad line. (The maid does however receive a \$10 raise and stars in the press ad as a stereotypical 'mammy' figure carrying a huge tray of meat.) Originality apparently evades Tom Rath in *The Man...*, and after seven attempts at writing the president's speech, the only feedback he is afforded - much to his evident frustration - is that it simply 'lacks *oomph*'.

Both Jim Blandings and Dennis Bagley declare their unparalleled knowledge of the products they work on, but the pitfalls of derivative or hackneyed creative work are ever-present, as the employees of title-character *Putney Swope* discover:

All right, I created Face-Off [a spot cream ad]; I conceived the Boorman Six [a sportscar commercial]; and don't forget the mousetrap [a new invention]. The rest of you people took old ideas and broken-down concepts and embellished them with a sense of show-business. When I see things that ain't fresh I get butterflies in my ulcer. So, from now on, you've got to come up with completely original fantasies: stop lookin' at the tube; stop reading magazines; and don't talk to strangers."

An unquestioning commitment to the job costs Ted Kramer his marriage and his career. In the film *Kramer v. Kramer* (1979) Dustin Hoffman's title character is initially unappealing as a pre-occupied ad creative who loses his job, while attempting to come to terms with his commitments as a newly-single parent - and a once-absent father. He takes a considerably

less-well-paid job as he struggles with lawyer's fees in a custody battle with his estranged wife (played by Meryl Streep). Although the metaphorical inferences of a career in advertising are perhaps limited in this film, they do inform the volatile and anxious character of Ted (Hoffman). The pressure to commit to late nights at the office or to take work home takes its toll: it is the system which breaks the man, and not vice-versa. The moral of the story, and there surely is one, is that in shuffling one's priorities, sacrifices must be made: to succeed in business is to place one's family life on hold. This is what *Advertising Age* calls the 'Working Late Blues' ('Takin' Care of Business Means Lots of Late Hours - With Dramatic Effect on Personal Lives'¹²).

Sometimes originality is not a scarce resource, but is simply dependent on the creatives involved being vigilant and professional. For example, two of Hollywood's recent, and very routine, excursions through the advertising business (*Nothing in Common* 1986, starring Tom Hanks and Jackie Gleason, and the revisionist Eddie Murphy vehicle *Boomerang* 1992), provide slick pastiches which only falter when the creative ace's personal troubles threaten client relations. Hanks reacts violently towards an important new client who attempts to bully him into flying to an important meeting - while his father (Gleason) lies in hospital, grievously ill. Meanwhile, Murphy's amorous preoccupations result in his creative staff producing a new perfume ad unsupervised; the subsequent client presentation proves to be a disaster as the unveiled ad (starring Grace Jones) provokes disgust and embarrassment, in equal measure. A modicum of diplomacy in the former case, and a competent rewrite in the latter, cure everyone's woes.

Creativity & Madness

According to these films there is an inalienable connection between commercial artistry, truth-telling, and mental breakdown (each stage being a manic advance on the one before). Why else would these characters feel a compunction to risk everything, including their

¹²*Advertising Age* July 29, 1991.

sanity, in order to 'tell it like it is'? *The Arrangement* (1969 US), *Bliss* (1985), *How to Get Ahead...*(1989), and *Crazy People* (1990) draw a direct link between extraordinary creativity and madness. Although the Freudian notion that creativity is a direct consequence of neuroses and failure is still highly contentious, the vision of a person's deteriorating mental health makes for compelling (and sometimes compassionate) viewing.

The evidence available suggests that drama, rather than comedy, provides the most credible rendering of this particular story, as the following example adequately illustrates. In *Crazy People*, Dudley Moore's character (Emory Leeson), is faced with a failed marriage and a crisis of conscience; he resolves to write truthful ads for his 'Mad' Avenue boss. The results - reminiscent of the most puerile of Adbuster-type parodies - lead to his incarceration. The ads run by mistake, become a huge success, and from then on, with the help of his fellow inmates, Leeson presents his new ideas within the confines of the luxurious asylum to which he was initially committed. The mad folk are lovable to a fault; Daryl Hannah's character turns out to be sane after all, and her helicopter-pilot brother flies in to whisk them all away to a rosy future of truth-telling-for-all. It would appear that the *benefits* of writing conscientious, or 'honest', ads are as absurd as the notion itself: it holds curative powers for the mentally ill, and is rewarded with large amounts of money and - in this case - one's choice of exotic or dream car.

The qualitatively different approaches to be found in non-U.S. cinema have provided two notable instances of English-language film-making about advertising, aside from the 'underground' efforts of director and writer Robert Downey in *Putney Swope*. The more darkly satirical possibilities of the creative mind-in-jeopardy have been explored to surreal effect in *How to Get Ahead...* and *Bliss* (1985, Australia), and provide sophisticated renderings of the good/evil, heaven/hell dichotomy (especially when compared to the rather lumpish offerings of *Pray For The Wildcats* (1974 US) or *Defending Your Life* (1991

US)). While they both make considerable capital out of the mental deterioration of their chief protagonist, one story emerges as the complete antithesis of the other.

After a near-death experience, Harry Joy (Barry Otto) resolves to change his ad agency's ways by firing those clients who pose particular ethical problems. His descent into mania is both graphic and harrowing; the literary allusions rich and suggestive. By contrast, Bagley's early epiphany, in which he is struck by the absurdity of the deceptions he has been so adept at inventing, is followed by a frenzied attempt to rid himself of the incriminated consumer goods which infest his palatial house. Whereas Joy ultimately 'opts out', and finds sanctuary in a sub-tropical forest hideaway (by leaving his incestuous children and his adulterous business partner far behind) Bagley is literally consumed by his *alter-ego*. The ascendancy of his pathological nemesis heralds a new world of advertising in which even the trivialities of consumption are to be glorified.

Unhappy Affluence

The late 1960s were to prove pivotal in the history of advertising films. Three movies in particular provided polemical assaults on the cheery affluence that had emerged as *the* standard theme in the previous two decades. Together with *Putney Swope*, films such as *The Arrangement*, *The Way We Live Now* (1970 US) and *I'll Never Forget What's 'isname* (1967 UK) use high drama to question the cultural values and assumptions of society at the time. *I'll Never Forget ...* is a lesser-known British production which starred Oliver Reed as Andrew Quint, a successful ad man who, in the opening scenes, smashes up his office and walks away from the business. Ultimately he is unable to escape: his old boss, Jonathan Lute (Orson Welles) buys the literary magazine where Quint had sought sanctuary, in order to have him write and produce a new commercial. The cynical ad he produces - given complete artistic freedom by Lute - consists in stock images of nuclear bunkers and Nazi concentration camp footage. It ultimately wins a top award, which, as it turns out, had been Lute's intention all along (Bean 1968a:26):

Lute: If you knew what it cost me, apart from what you spent. Why, bribing the jury alone...

Quint: They selected it.

Lute: Well, it had to *look* original, I knew you could do that, at least .

Lute then proceeds to fire Quint, eclipsing the latter's cynicism, and underlining the futility of his attempt not only to reclaim an earlier ideal, but to successfully distance himself from his unhappy arrangement of wealth, wife, and sundry mistresses. And all this is conveyed via the cruel irony of a bitter non-commercial turned over into another advertising success-story.

The theme of profound dissatisfaction as a direct result of 'having everything' also permeates *The Arrangement*, *The Way We Live Now* (and *Madison Avenue 1962 US*). *The Arrangement*, in particular, anticipates the mental breakdown of Bagley in *How to Get Ahead...*, but the descent is both turgid and unrelenting. Voluntarily committed to an asylum after a failed suicide attempt, various run-ins with his mistress and wife, and an aborted attempt to return to work, Anderson (Kirk Douglas) is still haunted by his successful but soulless life. In a series of brief flashbacks, the slick ad man he had once been returns to taunt him: "The fact is, without money and without your job, you're nothing....if you think you're going to get rid of me you're out of your god-damned mind. You had the perfect arrangement: Fab job, beautiful house, understanding wife, all the nookie you could handle: you had it all."

The moral of such a story is suggested by Michael Winner, the director of *I'll Never Forget...*, who invokes the experience of the painter Gauguin to suggest that the point of *his* film is that 'ideals' are really 'pipe dreams': "There's no desert island you can go to....if you're going to satisfy yourself and make yourself happy, you must do it in your own society" (Bean 1968b:4). As if intentionally echoing some of the major themes of earlier ad

films - and social theory - Winner explains the dilemma of Quint, his lead character, and the more general response he tries to emulate:

in an affluent society, where people have the comforts which a few years ago they thought of as luxuries...you have a great standardisation of society. You find more and more people dropping out of it. Dissatisfied with the comfort, dissatisfied in a way, with the security. It shows itself in the more popular taking of drugs, of the desire for more spiritual, mystical solace. The Hippie movement in America. This will all, I think, be greatly increasing in the latter part of this century (*ibid*).

How to Get Ahead presents a vision of the future saturated in the colossal artifice of a fully developed consumer culture; a logic of material acquisition brought to a perverse conclusion. The closing view of the vainglorious Bagley II in suit and new moustache bares an uncanny resemblance to Eddie Anderson in *The Arrangement* (1969) and even the 1950s gray-flannel organization man, thus bringing us back full circle to the popular explorations and classic theoretical critiques of an uncertain, post-war period. It was here, in the original novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), that the lead character woefully considered a switch from public relations to advertising: "I'll write copy telling people to eat more cornflakes and smoke more and more cigarettes and buy more refrigerators and automobiles, until they explode with happiness" (quoted in Fox 1984:201).

Truth & Consequences

How to Get Ahead... can be usefully compared to *Bliss*, *Putney Swope*, and even *Crazy People* in its meditations on advertising as a misleading practice. Indeed, each film contains scenes in which the lead actor, as a successful creative, confronts this as a distinct possibility. In *How to Get Ahead...*, Bagley marks his resignation with a film made out of his old ads ("All I've done is re-edit them, revoice them, and put in the truth" (Robinson 1989:206)). In *Bliss*, Harry Joy is initially shocked to discover his creative partner's secret dossiers, which confess the harmful effects of the products they advertise: "You've said that saccharine causes cancer. You've told our biggest client that they're criminals!"; shortly

after this he decides the client must be fired. In *Crazy People*, Emory Leeson resolves to write truthful ads, even if his partner cannot be convinced ("Let's face it Steve: you and I lie for a living, and it's not easy for me to digest that any more"); he too suffers the consequences.

As a form of resistance, these strategies have very different effects. Leeson's ads become a huge success, suggesting that all along the only remedy required is a commitment to being frank about their intentions (e.g. 'United Airlines: Most of our passengers get there alive'). However, as the *New York Times*' film reviewer was to note, as "a feature-film equivalent to those commercials that pretend to be sending themselves up" it fails, because Leeson's 'upside-down' ads "knowingly celebrate the system they are supposed to be satirizing"¹³. Harry Joy's efforts come to naught except personal salvation: he is first ostracized, then incarcerated, while the 'great machinery of desire' rolls on unchecked. Bagley's alter-ego takes over, his film is destroyed, and consumption moves on apace.

Further discussion: How (and why) Bagley got ahead in advertising

There is an important distinction to be made here between *implied* plot developments and the actual focus of the film's narrative. Leeson apparently turns the entire ad industry around (and, by extension, the consumer culture) with the stroke of a type-writer key, although what we actually see is the coming together of himself and his attractive friend (Daryl Hannah). We, as viewers, join Harry Joy in merely turning away from the 'real' world that lies beyond the forest. Its assumed fate is both moral and ethical bankruptcy, since all the dubious characters - clearly deserving that hellish place - have slipped from view. Putney Swope, too, walks out on the ad business having turned it upside down (*and*

¹³Vincent Canby (1990) 'Dudley Moore Acts Up in Tony Bill's "Crazy People"' New York Times April 11, p.C16.

having made a few million dollars in the process - which he shares out equally amongst the staff).

However, Bagley's triumphant 'return' (i.e. the arrival of Bagley II) results not in mere lies, but in wholesale manipulation - which, according to one of his colleagues, "completely violates all accepted codes of advertising" (Robinson 1989:183); and it is this which remains the focus of attention. *How to Get Ahead...* inverts the contrivances of the other two films: the usual ingredients for a happy ending are lost to the egotistical posturing of the solitary ad-man, surveying England - his new target-market - from a hilltop. In this case, closure only occurs in as much as narrative conventions demand it; the euphoria of the climactic ending is both bitter and deeply troubling. For these reasons, *How to Get Ahead...* achieves a great deal more as a critique of advertising and consumption than any of the other films discussed, and is therefore discussed in more detail here.

Although lacking the stylistic and richly textural flourishes of Peter Greenaway's work (see below), *How to Get Ahead...* involves the use of a similarly acerbic manner to that found in *The Cook...*, and provides another writer/director's eloquent take on the Eighties and "Mrs. Thatcher's 'Economic Miracle'" (Robinson 1989:xviii). In Bruce Robinson's film, physical violence gives way to aggressive satire; graphically vile drama to grotesque black comedy. The refusal to subscribe to "the generally escapist offerings of the movie industry" (MacNeill & Burczak 1991:117) is a hallmark of both productions.

How to Get Ahead... is perhaps the only widely-known British film in recent times which takes advertising as its central theme. It is also exceptional in its avoidance of the most pervasive conventions or clichés of popular movie-making. In particular, its closing scenes are a mockery of the predictable and trite resolutions to be found elsewhere: the ubiquitous love-interest is no longer sanctified; all *he* desires of *her* is 'vigorous sexual intercourse'. Indeed, the main character welcomes his wife's troubled departure; the passionate rhetoric

which ensues reveals his intention to take a new bride: the embodiment of an invigorated consumer culture, in which marketing acumen takes on a philanthropic sheen.

In order to convey the crisis of conscience which afflicts ace creative Dennis Bagley (Richard E. Grant), Robinson uses a visual device which is all the more startling since it owes much to the genre of horror; it also reveals the pun in the film's title. While trying to come up with an idea to sell spot cream, Bagley's recurrent concerns about his profession literally 'come to a head' in the appearance of a psychosomatic boil on his neck. His evident shock on discovering that the boil has grown a face - and has begun to talk to him - is diagnosed by his doctor as a delusional breakdown; "the price [he's] paying for [his] creativity" (Robinson 1989:157).

The cleaving of Bagley's persona is a graphic manifestation of the competing drives of artistic integrity and business acumen. Even in his mania, Bagley is increasingly cogent in his criticisms of the logic of marketing and consumption, or "the distortion of truth by association"; for example, "[o]il companies sold as champions of the environment!" (Robinson 1989:133,206). Meanwhile, the boil begins its insidious growth by uttering obscenities and hackneyed advertising slogans at the most inopportune moments. Finally, in a repulsive climax worthy of David Cronenberg, it grows to the size of a human head and takes over Bagley's body, concealing his real head in a swathe of surgical bandages. It is this second version (hereafter 'Bagley II'), the restored and ruthless advertising man (whose 'conscience' is then literally removed - surgically lanced) who triumphantly declares his commitment to "give [the consuming public] anything, and everything they want" (*ibid*:210).

Seen in its entirety, the film's narrative could be representative of any personal crisis of conscience; a microcosm of the creative mind's eternal dilemma: in the face of a task which demands more than a modicum of self-reflection, eagerness is quickly overtaken by doubt. Immediate worries then expand to global misgivings, as the original creative frustration

remains unresolved. On the other hand, finding a solution brings everything back into perspective - and from this recovered vantage point the 'system' can once more be envisioned as benign. Alternatively, the narrative can be seen as a consolidation of contemporary debates about the consumer culture. In his vision of a future in which "[t]hey're gonna get it bigger, and brighter, and *better*", Bagley II rails against those who might think otherwise (especially the scarred remains of the original Bagley on 'his' neck): "How *dare* some snotty Marxist carbuncle presume to deny them it!" (Robinson 1989:210).

In the last conversation Bagley II has with his wife before she leaves him, he defends the advertised life as a triumph of choice (*ibid*:208):

Bagley II: It's a free market. People will either buy, or they won't buy. Nobody's forcing them. Everybody knows what they're getting.

Julia: Perhaps they don't.

Bagley II: Of course they do. People might be a bit greedy from time to time, but we're not blind. We got our eyes open, and we have a choice.

Julia: Perhaps.

Bagley II: Stop saying perhaps. What's 'perhaps' got to do with it?

Julia: Perhaps they don't.

Bagley II: '*Perhaps*' if they hanged Jesus Christ, we'd all be kneeling in front of a fucking gibbet! But that isn't the real world. In the real world I have a *choice*. Do I want it, or don't I?

What is particularly instructive in this exchange is the slick transition of interest from 'they', via 'we', to 'I', which neatly reveals Bagley II's underlying self-motivation. His hypocrisy also becomes self-evident as he leaves his mansion to ride one of his horses through some spectacular - and pointedly *unspoiled* - English countryside: his final speech turns to people's 'love' of cars, the fact that "[r]oads represent a fundamental right of man to have access to the good things in life"; and that travel by train is something no-one should suffer (Robinson 1989:209). His credo ("There is no greater freedom than freedom

of choice") and his reactionary stance are uncompromising. He directs a torrent of political clichés at his exorcised conscience, citing environmental extremism ("you don't even want roads!") or simply name-calling ("You Commies don't half talk a lot of shit" *ibid*:175).

For Bagley II, personal expression and happiness are clearly dependent on a continuous stream of innovative products (and enhancing chemicals); "[w]e're living in a shop. The world is one magnificent fucking shop. And if it hasn't got a price tag, it isn't worth having".

Conclusions

I often think that pictures like [How to Get Ahead... and Bliss] are so forceful, partly because the artists [in film-making] are in very similar situations [to the artists in advertising]...and generally feel they should be writing plays, they should be writing a novel, they should be writing something of true value.

John Frizzell¹⁴

Advertising and film-making as creative processes

Regardless of the similarities between the businesses of advertising and film-making, such as awards ceremonies for creative achievement (jealous accolades which, for advertising creatives at least, appear to constitute a *raison d'être*), or, the orientation towards success as an exercise in marketing prowess (demonstrated by product placement or promotional tie-ins), advertising can never enjoy the critical autonomy sometimes available in film.

This predicament in itself suggests an explanation as to why advertising creatives repeatedly figure in movie narratives about crises of conscience: the film-maker can explore a shared dilemma without implicating or besmirching the very medium upon which he or she depends for artistic expression. As one screenwriter suggested, in viewing films which use

¹⁴Personal communication with John Frizzell, December 16, 1993. Frizzell is an established screenwriter for film and television, and an instructor at Praxis Film Development Workshop in Vancouver. He has also been a regular member of the selection committee at the Canadian Film Centre.

advertising as their thematic focus "generally what you're seeing mirrors somehow the fall of the artists who are writing that project...and generally feel...they should be writing something of true value"¹⁵. Thus, on occasion, the shared anxieties and frustrations of advertising creatives (art directors; copywriters) and film creatives (directors; scriptwriters) surface as a storyline in the movies; the dilemmas of the former group may often be explored as an extension of the latter's predicament. Put another way, the hidden *creative* discourse of the cultural intermediaries (filmmakers/writers and ad makers/writers in particular) finds private/public expression through films.

For any audience, the qualitative differences between contemporary film and commercials are fairly obvious, although the distinction is far less demarcated than might at first be thought: for example, scholars have sometimes noted that 'behind the scenes', this division is much less well defined. Mark Crispin Miller is amongst those who have observed that some of the most successful film directors in Hollywood today started their careers in advertising, either shooting or writing commercials (Alan Parker; Tony Scott; Ridley Scott; Hugh Hudson; Adrian Lyne).

In some instances, advertising becomes a cloying substitute: "Other creatives come into advertising though they would rather be writing screen plays and novels, composing music, writing lyrics, designing furniture, or directing feature films. They may be attracted initially by the money but once involved, it becomes 'the only game in town' " (Shapiro 1981:43). Even those who have not made a transition from copywriter to scriptwriter sometimes express similar aspirations:

Interviewer: If you had to choose between doing advertising or writing screenplays or going into television, what's your ideal?

Creative Director: Screenplays. Because it's a longer format and I don't have to sell anything. I just have to tell a good story....I'll have no clients to deal with either; I'll have only my craft (LK5).

¹⁵Frizzell, *op. cit.*

Miller also notes a complimentary trend in which established Hollywood directors take on advertising projects, and he adds a further fourteen famous names to the roster, including Altman, Scorsese, Fellini, Godard, Coppola, Lynch, Schlesinger, and Frears (Miller 1990:49).

From a creative point of view, film is generally considered by observers and insiders to allow much greater freedom for exploration and expression, although both activities carry inherent limitations. Whereas a film project clearly has huge advantages in terms of the time taken to develop a storyline and introduce characters, and ostensibly lacks the immediate necessity to focus on a product or service (which one might call 'commercial determinism'), there is still a pressure to conform to the established expectations of the industry, producers, marketers, and financiers.

The film narratives that have been discussed here reveal invention as the core function of the advertising agency, which is ostensibly the most appealing and engaging aspect to highlight and explore, but is also a vital feature of the process of promotion. On film at least, even as we are invited to identify with a precociously talented art director or copywriter, or a maverick who combines both skills, their capacity to *invent* remains a resolute mystery.

Death of the Director?

The personal impulses which culminated in the production of *I'll Never Forget...* and *How to Get Ahead...* provide a fine illustration of the marked differences in attitude which can still transpire in two similar films. Michael Winner, the director of *I'll Never Forget...*, and Bruce Robinson, the writer and director of *How to Get Ahead...*, identify with their characters in very different ways. Robinson is unabashed in his indictment of right-wing governmental policies in Britain (Robinson 1989), and the misery he personally suffered as a drama student and unemployed writer. Both *How to Get Ahead...* and *Withnail and I*

(1987 UK) share an autobiographical impulse, although this is far more apparent in the latter's invocation of the cultural and physical decay of London in 1969.

Winner, on the other hand, readily identifies with someone other than the 'hero' of *I'll Never Forget...* Although we have perhaps been conditioned to imagine the worst of the power-brokers in ad films - the sponsors, clients, and media moguls - Winner defies our expectations: "Orson Welles [as Jonathan Lute] is not meant to be the villain of that picture. Orson Welles, really representing big business, the debauched, witty tycoon, is also likeable" (Bean 1968b:4). Winner also feels it necessary to comment that "I personally do not object to working for money"; a cynic might be tempted to take this literally, given Winner's subsequent filmography, which includes such cinematic gems as *Death Wish* (1974 US); *Death Wish II* (1982 US); and *Death Wish 3* (1985 US).

This observation threatens to undermine the certainty with which we can ascribe intentionality to film narratives; here, the polarized agendas of two directors have actually produced similar films. Clearly, however, to deny *any* ideological continuities between the intentions of film-makers and the 'message' of their movies would be absurd. If anything, this moment serves as a caveat for conflated argumentation.

From Advertising To Consumerism

Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989 UK) is a film which presents a metaphorical rumination on the state of the industry from which it springs, *and* a critique of contemporary (consumer) society. It is significant in as much as it was created on the periphery, since Greenaway works outside and against an established regime. As a self-declared auteur¹⁶ the writer-director of such works as *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982 UK) and *The Belly of an Architect* (1987 UK) enjoys a rare degree of creative - and political - autonomy. Thus a recent article exploring the film as a critique of consumerism pivots on the assertion that all Greenaway's films "can be

¹⁶G. Smith (1990) 'Food For Thought' *Film Comment* 26, May-June, pp.54-60.

viewed, in part, as a polemic against Hollywood and mainstream mass cultural practices" (MacNeill & Burczak 1991:117). As these authors note, the fact that "U.S. critics almost unanimously ignored the political nature of the film while condemning it for failing to conform to the North American movie's standard of entertainment reveals as much about Anglo-American culture as *The Cook's* most scathing scenes" (*ibid*).

The article is of interest here for two reasons. First of all, and perhaps least surprising, it indicates that we must generally look outside "the already limited Hollywood entertainment market" (*ibid*) in order to find any articulation of a sustained critique of contemporary (Western) society. Second, an intriguing parallel is drawn between two of the film's main settings (a restaurant and its kitchen) and some of the most resonant dichotomies in contemporary social theory. Thus, while the restaurant and its patrons are seen to represent all that is excessive/decadent/superficial/acquisitional about contemporary consumption (in its broadest sense), the kitchen and its workers carry an aura of harmony/beauty/sensuality (analogous to the promise of the Enlightenment). Moreover, the reputedly thuggish greed of the Thatcherite/Reaganite Eighties is personified in The Thief (the owner and frequent patron of the restaurant, who has a penchant for acts of appalling violence), whereas the essential creativity and productive passion that has been lost to history is embodied in The Thief's Cook (*ibid*:120).

In suggesting that consumption and creativity are not merely antagonistic, but fundamentally opposed (MacNeill & Burczak 1991:119); somehow symptomatic of the split between low and high culture, Greenaway meditates on the enormity of the contradictions faced (or *not* faced) by those whose livelihoods depend on creative expression within a consumer culture.

Ultimately, as this collection of films demonstrates, the satirical possibilities of cinema have been explored all too infrequently (and, according to the film reviewers at least, have rarely succeeded as such). Their overwhelming contribution has simply been to record and

reinforce contemporary liberal values, and to reflect these in the mildly conflictual machinations of the ad industry. Particularly telling is the fact that not one single film questions the ultimate efficacy of advertising, and its audience is as open to manipulation in the 1990s (e.g. *How to Get Ahead...*) as it was potentially gullible in the 1940s (see *A Letter to Three Wives*). Of course, there have been moments when the agency has feared that it might be simply boring its audience (e.g. *The Hucksters*), but the principle notion that advertising works, through empathy, aspiration, repetition, or deception remains unquestioned - and is probably part of its attraction as a dramatic narrative device.

A deeper exploration of these issues has been left to a few exceptional films, which have used the promotional routines repeatedly revealed in other movies as a starting point for their own politicized commentaries. As we have seen, it is the troubling contradictions, best explored in *How to Get Ahead...*, *Bliss* (and, to a lesser extent, *I'll Never Forget What's 'isname*; and *The Arrangement*) which are of particular interest, not least because the material examined in Chapter Two was so lacking in this respect. Furthermore, the general lack of scholarly consideration of the important contributing role of creatives, in the advertising process, has further undermined any possibility of clarifying the emotional and affective dimension of promotional rhetoric. This problem is addressed in the next chapter, in which modifications to Johnson's circuit are considered as a possible route through this impasse.

Chapter Four

Defetishizing Advertising: Creativity and the Circuit Reconsidered

Introduction: The Short Circuit

In the previous two chapters, two rather 'dislocated' forms of analysis were discussed. These represented a plurality of views from the perspective of production in Chapter Two, and, in Chapter Three, a text-based study focusing not on advertisements, but on advertising and its portrayal in popular movies. These two moments are now reconsidered using modifications to Johnson's model.

Up until now, it has been assumed that the circuit, representing a way of understanding "the production and circulation of subjective forms" (Johnson 1986/87:47), concerned, in its latter moment, the realm of 'public' consumption (and by inference an unspecified consumer). Here, we have understood "reading or cultural consumption as a production process in which the first product becomes a material for fresh labour"; i.e. from 'text-as-produced' to 'text-as-read' (*ibid*:58). However, my claim here is that we can also recognize the existence of a secondary 'privatized' loop which falls short of the more usual pattern. This 'short circuit' is one in which the cultural intermediaries act as producers *and* consumers. Due to its attenuated length, meanings and values travel through the short circuit much faster than they might in the ordinary circuit (see Appendix 1). Much of the evidence for this assertion springs from the comments made in the case study involving interviews with creative directors.

The argument has been made that there is a pedagogic function in advertising, in which private codes are disseminated to a broader cultural mass via the creatives. As 'perfect' *cultural* consumers operating in a particularly rarefied social milieu, their own cultural readings are highly attuned. They also 'consume' ads written by other people, often in

hyper-critical ways; they 'consume' award-winning and/or controversial campaigns; and they gravitate towards a number of cultural 'watering holes' which provide sustenance, inspiration, or even 'rip-off material'. These are inevitably subject to a high level of turnover in the constant movement toward new experiences, styles, or graphic 'looks', but have included magazines such as *The Face*, *i.D.*, and *Arena*; club culture; and film or music 'scenes'.

Given this assertion, Johnson's description of 'lived cultures' - formerly assumed to refer to consumers in general - takes on a very particular significance. He writes of "the existing ensembles of cultural elements already active within particular social milieus...and the social relations on which these combinations depend. These reservoirs of discourses and meanings are in turn raw material for fresh cultural production. They are indeed among the specifically cultural conditions of production" (1986/87:47). Style magazines have been written about in the precise context of the cultural intermediaries:

Magazines such as *The Face* and other similar cultural forms (and here we may include the particular stylistic features of...new advertising formats...) are indeed the perfect vehicles to carry the cultural values of this new counter-culture....[They] become the natural forms for those social groups who, as Bourdieu points out, are in the process of 'inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratifications and prestige of the intellectual at the least cost' (Bourdieu 1984:370). (Lee 1993:174-175)¹.

The 'children of Marx and Coca-Cola' can finally be 'seen' as a producing and consuming cohort which acts, at least in the latter realm, as an autonomous, or self-addressing entity. (I would, however, sympathize with Davidson in his expressed reservations about any attribution of truly 'counter-cultural' tendencies; indeed, he argues that *The Face* is little more than a guide to 'hip consumerism' (1992:189).)

Here, the cohort's members draw sustenance from their own ranks, i.e. *from the work of other cultural intermediaries*, be they: copywriters; art directors; graphic, packaging, stage,

¹For further debate on *The Face*, see in particular Kathy Myers (1986) *Understains: The sense and seduction of advertising* London, Comedia; Dick Hebdige (1988) *Hiding in the Light* London, Routledge; and Davidson (1992).

set, jewellery, industrial, or retail/window-display designers; fashion and style journalists; photographers; film and TV directors; screen-writers; illustrators; animators; model-makers; typographers; actors, models, and musicians; music and media industry workers; and museum and art gallery workers.

Collaboration between intermediaries is common. Art directors habitually call on the expertise of photographers, illustrators, and typographers; photographers work with stylists, models, and model makers; producers of films, ads, and TV shows depend on orchestrated collaborations of writers, art directors, actors, set designers, costume designers, model makers, musicians, animators, and typographers. A second level of activity involves the handling, sometimes at a distance, of one intermediary's work by several others. Advertising is again an illuminating example: the creative team provides a promotional platform for a commodity which has probably already been the result of successive involvements by product or industrial designers (and their model makers), and then packaging designers (with illustrators, photographers, and typographers). The work of the ad creatives is probably augmented by other promotional activities such as in-store displays (point-of-sale designers; retail and shop-window designers); sales promotions (art directors and copywriters working with the same intermediaries with whom their more celebrated namesakes confer); direct marketing (art directors and copywriters, again). 'Commodity aesthetics'² are therefore the result of a cumulative and complex network of interventions by cultural intermediaries.

Johnson reminds us that "it is possible to consider the relationship, if any, between the characteristic codes and conventions of a social group and the forms in which they are represented in a soap opera or comedy" (1986/87:74). The opportunity offered by the analyses of the previous two chapters - and based on the new assertions made above - is to compare the production perspective on advertising's cultural intermediaries with 'filmic

²W. F. Haug (1986) Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: appearance, sexuality and advertising in capitalist society Cambridge, Polity Press.

fictions'. As has already been argued, movies such as these constitute a genre, in which dramatic and comedic approaches have been employed in order to portray creatives. Correlative evidence will therefore serve to improve the degree of confidence with which we can assert the validity of the schematic connections between two very distinct moments.

To summarize, we can now understand the circuit - in its short version - to relate to cultural intermediaries (particularly admen and/or popular film-makers) at all moments in the cycle. Extending this argument, we might assert that the film narratives themselves can be seen as illustrated explorations of Johnson's circuit. Even though the movie can be objectified as a 'text', to a greater or lesser degree it can also be seen as a journey around the circuit, thus: life in the agency (production); advertisements (texts); readings and reactions to their own work (often implicit; sometimes angst-ridden); and, life outside the agency (consumption). Furthermore, in some respects this 'celluloid circuit' is also a *short* circuit - since the stories are often told from the perspective of the cultural intermediaries themselves. The importance of the films for our analysis of creativity, and advertising more generally, is now magnified.

Based on the assumption that the status quo (or existing 'real-life' circuits) are problematic, if not dysfunctional, the next section draws together evidence from all three previous chapters to investigate ways in which the intermediaries might conceivably bring about change.

Switching Circuits: Towards Social Change

Consideration of the concept of creativity finally leads us into the moral and ethical implications of the job of advertising. Whether in the muted doubts or suspicions of actual creatives, or the dramatized epiphanies of film characters, the question of conscience can often be felt. The following section takes as its cue the analogous offerings of the films discussed earlier, in which the answer to the ad man's nervous dilemma is ultimately: (a) to

continue working, albeit in a drastically modified way, and in as conscientious a manner as the business will allow; (b) to opt out entirely - to turn one's back on the gray flannel 'rat race'; (c) to turn activist or even revolutionary; or (d) to bounce back with a re-energized and pointedly cynical ethos. If creativity is the motive power driving the circuit, then these options can also be understood as, respectively: modest attempts to modify or rehabilitate the circuit; disowning it entirely (and thereby withdrawing one's own creative energies); attempting to break or even sabotage the circuit completely; or, finally, upgrading its wiring.

a) The Crisis of Conscience

Some of the most celebrated advertising creatives have at some time or another hinted at the moral or ethical baggage which, from time to time, threatens to weigh them down. Given that they are sometimes encouraged to conflate their personal sense of purpose with a more universal potency ("I try and explain to them the enormous significance of what they are doing, the enormous power that they have in the world....It is their imprint, if you like, on mankind" Olins in Fletcher 1990:14) it is perhaps unsurprising that at times they perceive their 'burden' to be significant.

Gossage's Last Stand...and The Case of Cigarettes

The feverish activity of a true-life, successful American ad man - who had been told he had a matter of months left to live - eclipsed even the most dramatic moral epiphanies of the movies. Howard Gossage's obituary declared that he was the "witty, cultured, talented mainspring of the San Francisco ad agency of Freeman, Mander & Gossage....also noted as the discoverer of Marshall McLuhan and as a stinging gadfly of the ad game" (Rotzoll 1980:6).

In the eighteen months before he died of leukemia at the age of 51³, Gossage performed an astonishing array of conscientious acts which, although listed in detail in Rotzoll's 'Reflections of advertising's legendary iconoclast', were patently *not* 'of concern here' - thus a potential link between Gossage's final gesture and "his career as advertising practitioner" (*ibid*) was curiously severed, at least for the readers of the *Journal of Advertising*. Amongst these achievements:

he adopted the Caribbean island of Anguilla and helped the natives declare a Quixotic independence [an ad he wrote had the headline: "Is it 'silly' that Anguilla does not want to become a nation of bus boys?"]...launched an environmental organization...wrote a brilliant advertising campaign against the Anti-Ballistic Missile...planned an academic seminar on the subject of Hell, to be held in Dublin and opened with a Mariachi Mass, coined the phrase 'Ear Pollution' for the problem of noise, which he had plans for solving...[and] gave dozens of speeches warning advertising men to repent before it was too late for him to save them (Hinckle in Rotzoll *ibid*).

Although we may never know what possessed Gossage to commit himself to such a radical turnabout, his actions find uncanny resonance in the exploits of his celluloid contemporaries. When Harry Joy thought he'd gone to Hell after his second near-death experience in *Bliss*, he resolved to be 'good'. Dennis Bagley (*How to Get Ahead...*) seized upon an ad he'd once written about the dangers of smoking in order to attack the ad business and his boss, *and* to determine his own destiny:

To me this represents everything that is wrong...and everything that is vile with this profession....It is the reason I'm resigning....I believed in it, and I sat back like some gagged little idiot while they bugged it....I'm going to rid my mind and body of poisons. And when I've done it, I intend to make it my life's work to encourage others to do it (Robinson 1989:146-7).

Anticipating this same theme, Eddie Anderson (Kirk Douglas in *The Arrangement*) returns to work after recovering from his suicide attempt, only to break down in the middle of a presentation. The client is Zephyr Cigarettes: "Bullshit. We know what we're going to put on the tip of everybody's tongue. We mustn't say the dirty word here, but it's not 'The Clean One'; it's the big 'c'. That's it, huh? Thanks."

³Fox notes that "[f]rom 1949 to 1959, at a time when the life expectancy of white males was 67.1 years, the average age at death in *Advertising Age's* obituaries was 59.9" (1984:209).

Frederic Wakeman, author of *The Hucksters*, had already left the advertising business, and apparently based his tyrannical character Evan Llewelyn Evans on his own client George Washington Hill, who was in charge of Lucky Strike cigarettes (Fox 1984:201). Joseph Bensman was the author of an early ethnography based on his own experience in advertising (originally published under the pseudonym 'Ian Lewis'). He 'came out' in *Dollars and Sense* (Bensman 1967), breathing a sigh of relief as he explained how he had now taken up 'more dignified work' in the academy.

Peter Carey is the Australian novelist responsible for *Bliss*, in which the carcinogenic properties of saccharine and petrol cause havoc for agency and advertiser alike. Carey was once an ad man, and yet the writer of the introduction to the film script for *Bliss* feels that this fact is of little consequence: "Like [his characters] Harry Joy and Honey Barbara, Carey has lived on a Queensland commune though, unlike Harry, he commuted by plane to his Sydney advertising agency to earn enough money in a week to spend the rest of the month writing and gardening. All this is biographically interesting; it is of no critical interest at all" (Anderson in Carey & Lawrence 1986:11). Of course, this *is* of *vital* critical interest: are we really to believe that Carey's fictional exploration of the life-and-near-deaths-and-death of an ad man - who runs off to live in the trees and is haunted by the possibility of Hell - bears absolutely no relation to the factual experience of Carey himself? Here is a man who actually embodied, in truly schizoid fashion, two very different lives, flitting as he did between the extremes of an alternative, experimental community and the rather different ideological demands of urban, entrepreneurial capital.

The channeling of creative energy into projects which have altruistic overtones is a common activity amongst art directors and copywriters (see, for example, the article entitled 'They Also Serve: AD's [Art Directors] do the right thing with public service advertising'⁴). It is also a safe arena in which they can critically explore problems in advertising and the

⁴Eve Golden (1990) 'They Also Serve: AD's do the right thing with public service advertising' *Art Direction*, September.

consumer society (in pathos-tinged rhetoric) while still providing problem-and-solution in one-and-the-same breath. Bernbach once noted, presaging Olins' lofty comments, above, the "awesome responsibility...on the communicator's shoulders":

He [*sic*] has the skill, the talent and the knowledge to reach people and to touch their minds and hearts. He [*sic*] has a great contribution to make to the welfare of mankind. The time has come for him [*sic*] to move up...into the important company of those working to make the world habitable" (Bernbach 1980:206ff).

The theatrical duality of good-versus-evil weighs heavily on Bernbach's mind, since "morality doesn't come with that expertness (*ibid*).

Ed McCabe, too, in his 'Vital Speech of the Day', appeals to his Industry audience to recognize a 'higher obligation' in 'communicating with the public' as opposed to merely selling for the client. Remarking on the necessary "moral integrity of every piece of work we do" (1985:629), he notes that the very pervasiveness of advertising has become reason in itself to take more responsibility: "We *owe* it to *them* to make our advertising as aesthetically pleasing and as morally right as possible and *within that context* as effective as possible for our clients" (*ibid*). This is perhaps as close to the ultimate integrity of 'telling the truth' - Emory Leeson's 'strategy' in *Crazy People* - as the Renaissance ad man can come; the interviews discussed in Chapter Two are revisited here with this in mind.

Social Responsibility and Real Ads

Maybe I'm not doing it in the right way, but at least I'm doing it; a lot of people who are criticising me are sitting there doing nothing.

Dave Trott, creative director
(responding to accusations that his idea
of using images from the Holocaust
to publicise desperate food shortages in the
Third World was 'completely tasteless')
(in Davidson 1992:84).

'Alternative' uses of advertising, such as 'social issue' or charity campaigns, have become particularly noticeable in recent decades. Although this is partly due to their stylistic conventions, such as the use of black and white film or photography ("the staple idiom of

disaster beautified" Davidson 1992:87), it is their tendency to use rather more forthright emotional strategies than their mainstream counterparts that has probably ensured that they have 'got noticed'. Davidson notes that

over the last six years or so...the genre has really taken off. Spurred on by the increasing regularity with which this style of hard-hitting pathos has carried off industry awards (the path to fame and glory for copywriters), their creators, unleashed from the infantile bathos of mainstream campaigns, have pushed the limits of what we are prepared to be shocked by further and further back, producing ever more effective 'charity nasties' (1992:84).

Indeed, the most discernible factor in the views expressed by the three creative directors who were asked about social marketing, is that it is an additional, welcome opportunity to perform or promote their skills. This is partly because the broadcasting regulations are less stringent "when it's perceived that it's for the common good" (Interviewee A; Davidson 1992:84). At this point, personal issues often become a factor in the interviewees' reasoning: "we have a social conscience and we have concerns as citizens and as creative people" (A). In addition, all three express doubts about working on certain products, particularly cigarettes. This subject goes on to mention his role as a father, expressing his disappointment and shock at the poor quality of the media environment, especially for children. He also notes the irony that it is network TV, and not ads, which worry him for his child's sake: "She's not going to see anyone get shot or commit suicide in a commercial" (A). A further unintended irony is that it is precisely ads about social issues for which creatives' "boundaries of expression are expanded" (A); witness the visceral jolt of so-called 'fear-appeal' strategies in drink-driving or anti-drug campaigns, for example.

Another subject concurs that, as 'pet projects', the promoted awareness of drug issues or homelessness "can make a big difference. It can raise money for causes" (B). However, in some senses they are viewed as no different to 'ordinary' campaigns, except perhaps for an acknowledgement that "it shows that the communication power of advertising can be used to do a lot of good...we in this business have a lot of social responsibility" (B). Again, the creative opportunities are greater: "You're a complete creative failure if you can't do public

service or social advertising because there are so fewer rules on that stuff. And the whole tone of voice of that is to make an impact and push some emotional buttons, which you don't tend to get to do if you're selling soap" (B).

The third subject recalls that throughout the short history of the promotion of AIDS awareness, creatives have 'coveted' the opportunity to work on it "because you don't have a client that's telling you what to do" (D). Whether in the use of images of death and dying - a 'heavy-handed approach of scare tactics' - or more recent 'toned down' approaches, "[y]ou have more creative freedom". He goes on:

So when this came out, this was a disease that was perfect for advertising, because it's a serious, serious illness and the consequences are the ultimate consequence. And so if you look at AIDS as a product, it's a great product with a unique selling proposition and that's what I mean by it being very morbid, but that's why everyone jumped on it because as much as creatives like to do funny stuff, they also like to do that hard-hitting heavy handed stuff; trying to show off their range and elicit emotion (D)

We can perhaps conclude from these comments that the chance to exercise a greater degree of creative autonomy, to experiment with the use of more loaded emotional triggers, is at least as important as any broader concern over the social environment or the opportunity to improve, or compensate for, advertising's own self-image. (Davidson's main complaint is that the resulting relationship between the non-client and the agency is "too close, too cosy" (1992:85).)

As a potential remedy for a crisis of conscience, this kind of work clearly has its limitations, as Tom Rath - *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit* - might have guessed. Originally he had been asked to help write a speech, the purpose of which was to encourage support amongst the medical community for a mental health initiative. This noble ambition was always under threat of compromise since the speech was being 'manufactured' within a system steeped in the acumen of commerce, rather than the aura of conscience. As Fox has noted (1984:201), Rath is perplexed that, in the hands of other writers in the building, the drafted speech has become so repetitious it resembles a 'cheap advertising slogan' and,

as if anticipating the commonalities of technique noted by the interviewees, "they're going to sell mental health the way they sell cigarettes!" (Wilson 1955:189).

b) Dreams of Opting Out

Perhaps Gossage's last stand was ultimately a redemptive fantasy; so too the Dream House of *Mr. Blandings...*; the 'back to nature' adventure of an aging Harry Joy in *Bliss*; the haven of a small literary magazine in *I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name*; and many of the 'gleeful resignations' in the advertising novels of the 1940s and 1950s (Fox 1984:201-207). Rarely, however, does the escapism lead to any lasting sense of relief from a world collectively portrayed as "false in tone, tense in pace, vacant and self-hating, overheated and oversexed" (*ibid*:206). The possibilities of more noble artistic pursuits, such as film-making, or writing fiction ("As for the six novelists with backgrounds in the trade, it is striking that none remained in advertising" *ibid*:207), are eclipsed by the numerous attempts to find solace in a new lover. More often than not, these antics are more a reaction to a crisis of mediocrity rather than conscience (see for example: the wretchedness of Kirk Douglas's character in *The Arrangement*; the violent frustration of Oliver Reed's lead in *I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name*; or, the mid-life crisis in *The Way We Live Now*). The proven sanctity of true love also has its moment in *Bliss*, *Defending Your Life*, and *Madison Avenue*, in particular.

Social Responsibility and Reel Ads

The script-writing conceit of including fanciful versions of commercials within the films themselves, has been employed several times. However, as a novel device through which the lead character attempts to express his frustrations, it has often fallen foul of the chorus of disapproval it sets out to appease. In discussing this phenomenon, I will make reference to Kevin Robins' article 'Forces of Consumption' (Robins 1994).

In acknowledging the Freudian overtones of his own argument, Robins comments on "evasive strategies [which] may take the form of screening or filtering painful realities, or, alternatively...may work towards the transformation or even the substitution of reality....In the second case....[s]atisfaction may be obtained from illusions" (1994:454). Quoting Freud, he goes on: "More than this, 'one can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one's own wishes' " (Freud in Robins *ibid*).

The ad man - 'delusional' or no - is perfectly placed to produce idealistic fictions. On several occasions, cumulative nervous pressure leads him to produce 'spoof' ads: literally fantasy sequences in which 'illusory' truths are told "without the discrepancy between them and reality being allowed to interfere with enjoyment" (Freud in Robins *ibid*). Some of the ad-fantasies in *Putney Swope* and *Crazy People* are merely wet dreams; even as they 'speak the truth' they merely take implicit sexual overtones and make them explicit. In the end we find ourselves being invited to snicker at sexist innuendo: the former movie includes an ad for Lucky Airlines in which semi-nude stewardesses leap around in slow motion, only to descend *en masse* on a Lucky male passenger. This orgiastic display is denounced by one character ("Putney is confusing obscenity with originality"); no matter, since we've had our cake *and* eaten it. The 'truthful' ads in *Crazy People* were lent added caché since they featured actual brand names such as United Airlines, Jaguar, and Sony. The result was equally banal: 'Volvo. Boxy but good'; 'Sony. Because Caucasians are just too damned tall'. (Since the racism is inverted, it's somehow excusable; even entertaining.) Although we never see the result, the lead in *How to Get Ahead...* merely takes his old ads and 'puts in the truth' with a bit of judicious editing; that a radical gesture can be accomplished with such modest adjustment is a dubious premise indeed.

c) Activism and Revolution

We're all in trouble no matter who we are unless we stop getting involved with systems, people and projects that we really, deep inside, don't want to get involved with.

Robert Downey, Writer and Director of *Putney Swope*⁵

The writing of popular novels by Peter Carey, Frederic Wakeman and Sloan Wilson, and the making of films (Bruce Robinson; Peter Carey & Ray Lawrence; Robert Downey) can all be seen as attempts to seek an audience for one's beliefs. Similarly, the event-filled last days of Howard Gossage might be interpreted as a kind of redemptive or humanitarian gesture.

Using one popular medium in order to express doubts about another does display a certain irony, but it allows the catalyst to exercise his or her skills in the usual *manner* - but to radically different ends. (Having told his boss that he is going to 'cleanse' his life of advertising, Bagley, the disillusioned ad creative in *How to Get Ahead...*, agrees that he would even resort to 'walking up and down with a sandwich board' 'if necessary'. His boss replies: "Advertising, dear boy" - much to the chagrin of his wayward protégé.)

Putney Swope tells the story of a Black coup at a Madison Avenue ad agency, replete with para-military overtones. The lead character strides around the office dressed in Fidel Castro-style garb, followed closely by an entourage of boisterous revolutionaries. As we have seen, however, the promised overthrows and radical shake-ups threatened elsewhere in the movies rarely materialize; more likely is an attempt to opt out of the system rather than to change it from within. The muddled narrative of *DROP Squad* (1994 US) portrays a Black militia working underground to 'reprogram' errant African-American citizens. Their chief target is an ad man charged with sanctioning outrageously offensive ad campaigns.

⁵Arthur Knight (1969) 'Putney Swope' *filmfacts XII*, 16, pp.361-364.

Intense methods of interrogation and humiliation are designed to salvage and rekindle their abductees' Black consciences. Real-world strategies relying on individual effort (as opposed to state-legitimated political movements or legislation) include billboard altering⁶ and the production of ad parodies.⁷ Although these may provoke comment or debate, it can be argued that their collective oppositional voice is minimal due to the sheer saturation of public and private spaces with 'official' promotional rhetoric.

d) A Cynical Return: Business as Usual

The notion of a re-invigorated attitude towards the task of being a successful advertising man takes on a particularly noxious overtone when it results directly from a seeming moral epiphany. Such is the dramatic strength of *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* in which, as we have seen, Bagley II rises triumphantly like the phoenix with his vision of an invigorated consumer society. We see the resulting marketing campaign - emblematic of his new radical cynicism - strategized and produced. The spoof in this case is a music video launching a pop group whose terrible acne is highlighted in order to make boils fashionable. ("As soon as the kids are riddled, we'll kill the group, re-introduce purity, and motor in with the cream. Except by then it'll be much bigger than that. It'll be an 'Adventure in Hygiene' " Robinson 1989:183).

The nightmarish possibilities of 'idealistic fictions' are more fully realized in *I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name*. Having forsworn the ad business, amongst other things, the main character's dream of finding peace working in the provincial office of a literary journal is dashed ('He smashed up his desk, gave up a wife, three mistresses and went back to the simple life. Then his troubles really started!'). The owner of his old agency (Orson Welles)

⁶See for example the illustrations and discussion in Kathy Myers, *op. cit.*

⁷The Media Foundation, a Vancouver-based organization, produces postcards, calendars, and a quarterly magazine called *Adbusters* ('The Journal of the Mental Environment'), which features parodies of high-profile campaigns such as Absolut vodka, McDonald's, and Calvin Klein jeans. For comment, see Richard W. Pollay (1992) 'Conflict over Commercialism: Adversaries, Advocates and Adbusters' in Floyd Rudmin and Marsha Richins, eds., *Meaning, Measure and Morality of Materialism* Provo UT, Association for Consumer Research.

buys the magazine and coaxes him back. The last ad he produces is a vitriolic and apocalyptic vision which includes documentary footage of Nazi concentration camps and a nuclear bunker. The ultimate irony is that it wins a top creative award. In this film narrative the co-optation and commodification even of one's deepest fears proves that there is clearly no hope of escape.

In *Bliss*, Harry Joy's wife Bettina takes over his ad agency and declares her intention to take the international scene by storm. (Implicit in this strategy is the fact that, in order to do it, she must excel as a creative - as opposed to an account executive or a marketing expert). She bribes the director of the mental asylum in which Harry has been incarcerated, on the understanding that he will sell her ads. The ultimate irony here is that in descending into Harry's private Hell, she suffers the consequences; their dual fate echoes that of real-life ad man Howard Gossage: while Harry resolves to be 'good' after two near-death experiences, Bettina's ruthless ambition is only brought to a halt by the discovery that she has only months to live ("I need three years to make it in New York"). Growing up next to her father's gas station has finally produced in her a malignant cancer; the new campaign she has written is for a petroleum company. Her final act is to incinerate herself and her clients in the agency's boardroom, using three, large Molotov cocktails.

Concluding Arguments: Towards a Critical Theory of Commercial Creativity

The skilled magicians, the masters of the masses, must be seen as ultimately involved in the general weakness which they not only exploit but are exploited by. If the meanings and values generally operative in the society give no answers to, no means of negotiating, problems of death, loneliness, frustration, the need for identity and respect, then the magical system must come, mixing its charms and expedients with reality in easily available forms, and binding the weakness to the condition which has created it. Advertising is then no longer merely a way of selling goods, it is a true part of the culture of a confused society.

Williams (1980:190-191)

Much of this thesis has involved a historical sifting of some of the more popular - and populist - sociological texts of the post-War period, including more current writings on the advertising process. A link was then established between the concerns these reflect, and, via Chapter Three, films about advertising in a comparable period. This also served to highlight the familiarity that film-makers, and movie-audiences alike, have with the difficulties and contradictions facing those who seek to express their artistic sensibilities in a business context, and even the dramatic consequences of an accumulated creative angst.

The comparable theoretical 'take' on this aspect is disappointingly thin: Chapter Two explored both the brief scholarly canon on 'cultural intermediaries', including - but not limited to - ad creatives, and, via a series of interviews, many of the most persistent views they have about their work. There can be little doubt that much remains to be done if we are to understand better the implications of some of these findings. Whether or not creatives act in a recognizably autonomous way, their endeavours are clearly often at odds with the task they are apparently saddled with. Their consumption habits and lifestyles place them in a position of pre-eminence which is propagated and perpetuated through the styles, values and attitudes which saturate the work of all the cultural intermediaries. As Slater notes: "creative personnel rely on background knowledge of current connotations of various significations, a knowledge which frequently pertains more to their own class and culture than that of their target markets" (1985:249, after Millum). An exclusive internal dialogue is thus promoted through advertising's first audience - namely other ad creatives - either through trade press reviews or the proliferation of regional, national, and international awards schemes. This is illustrated in comments made by the deputy editor of the London ad trade magazine *Campaign*, in an article which *nominally* addresses controversial ads:

the problem for the mostly young, London-based, cosmopolitan creatives in advertising [is the] significant gulf between them and some of their consumers....given that they are paid to understand the minds of consumers, most advertising creatives socialise almost exclusively with their own kind. In the bars and clubs of London's Soho and Covent Garden, you will not find a great debate about taste in ads. The 'anything goes as long as it gets you noticed' school is dominant. Taste is in the eye of the creator....Is there a

solution? The most profound is the most unlikely - that agencies expand the make-up of their creative departments to reflect a wider cross-section of the general public (Hatfield 1995).

Art directors and copywriters tend to work in a guarded manner which serves to mystify the process of creation ("We close the door with our little creative workplan; we hang it up on the wall and then we start to create ideas" in Hirschman 1989:46). David Ogilvy has hinted at the reason why any attempt to understand this eternal search would be thwarted: "good ideas come from the unconscious" (1983:19). Furthermore, in referring to this stage in the advertising process as 'incubation', Shapiro (1981) suggests that it "remains very much a 'black box' activity. Although...necessary...it is the stage most awkward to accommodate [*sic*] to the imperatives of [the] organization" (1981:356). Before attempting to examine this enigma, it would be useful to consider how awkwardly the box fits into economic accounts of the advertising process.

On Being Economical with Emotions

Common to creatives and consumers alike are the hopes, dreams, fantasies and fears which we often attribute to the unconscious self. These factors have already emerged as strands in several arguments: the particular anxieties synonymous with the creative occupations, such as the class-based issues of the cultural intermediaries (career expectations, job insecurity, very high rewards); the core drive to be original; the ethical or moral dilemma of the institution; and, the reflection of many of these issues in the fictionalized narrative accounts of the cinema. Conversely, there has been a dearth of scholarly investigation into the emotive, affective dimension of creative, commercial communication. Even though its rise has been signaled in a variety of contexts, such as the *Wall Street Journal* (Schudson 1993:78), or the *Journal of Advertising* (Zinkhan 1993:3), the marketing research literature has actually been somewhat more vociferous than its social sciences or humanities equivalents (in spite of the contemporary surge in interest in all manner of issues relating to the politics and culture of consumption). Regardless, it is precisely the affective dimension

of commercial communication, and hence of the 'black box', which, by and large, cannot be accommodated in economic accounts.

Much of this thesis has concerned itself with the artistic; the emotional; the *anti-rational* eddies of the contemporary consumer culture - factors which, because of their apparently nebulous and unpredictable tendencies, have remained barely visible in the accounts of many of those who choose to observe, and to write about it. Popular - and, occasionally, banal - movies have provided a needed fillip to counter this habitual omission, with respect to the anxieties of artistic endeavour in a commercial context. However, while I have avoided any inference of liberating or emancipatory potential in these popular cultural products, I have also attempted to avoid an inverse bias, such as that demonstrated by Martyn Lee. In the concluding chapter of *Consumer Culture Reborn* (1993), Lee illustrates the "potential dangers that lie in wait from using such a fluid form as the commodity alone to objectify social consciousness" (1993:176) by drawing on the example of *American Psycho*⁸, a novel by Bret Easton Ellis about a particularly vicious serial killer. Since the central character is an apparently ordinary 'yuppie', for whom a stereotypical predilection for consumer goods is apparently a *substitute* for any recognizable consciousness (thus making him doubly abhorrent), the book is used by Lee as

a chilling warning of the consequences which may transpire when social life and experience are reduced to little other than the level of commodity consumption, and subjectivity is allowed to break free from most forms of social constraint and the responsibilities of morality, ethics, conscience, decision, political belief and other forms of social affiliation (1993:176).

The example, if not the argument, is entirely relative, as many of the films in Chapter Three demonstrate: the very same 'responsibilities' are played out in great dramatic detail, often providing the pivotal narrative moments for the movies in question. This would suggest that even the seemingly ordinary can provide much needed succour, without necessarily being implicated in the tit-for-tat of structuralist and culturalist debates over the relative

⁸Bret Easton Ellis (1991) *American Psycho* London, Picador.

worth of popular entertainments. Unsurprisingly, the former tendency, in its econometric or rationalist manifestation, has considerable difficulty accounting for consumption's *affective* dimension - its 'structure of feeling'⁹ - which is, of course, highly visible in the promotional frame.

Leo Bogart's *Commercial Culture: The Media System and the Public Interest* (1995) is notable for several reasons. Bogart's description of a sample of TV ads belies the emotional range and visceral appeal of contemporary creative strategies (especially with regard to social issues) and, for this reason, ultimately proves to be inadequate: "Advertisements cast life in a happy glow. They are not part of the world of violence, anger, depression, and offbeat sex that fills the columns of the press and television's prime-time hours. Theirs is a world of pure romance and warm fellow-feeling" (1995:82).

Furthermore, in considering the role of creativity in this 'commercial culture', he seeks to demonstrate that the "greatest of artists have freely acknowledged their willingness to follow market demands" (*ibid*:244). This is in complete contrast to the creatives studied in the Chapter Two, and Winston Fletcher in particular, who had specifically extolled Mozart's 'potent creativity' and his 'seemingly effortless inspiration' in his guide to the effective (i.e. sympathetic) management of creativity (Fletcher 1990). Bogart chooses to cast and quote Mozart in a rather different light: "Believe me, my sole purpose is to make as much money as possible; for after good health it is the best thing to have" (Mozart in Bogart 1995:244). The irony of this anomaly (Bogart has sourced similar sentiments expressed by Igor Stravinsky, Pablo Picasso, Charlie Chaplin, and Norman Rockwell) perfectly captures not the partisan motivations of Fletcher's and Bogart's research, but the paradoxical nature of post-Enlightenment creative expression.

Bogart links the erosion of (commercial) artists' relative integrity to their advancement within a formidable business hierarchy:

⁹This is Raymond Williams's term. See Williams (1980).

"Individuals who make the transition from creative work to management generally are transformed in the process. If not, they can hardly handle their new assignments comfortably. Most of the people who run large media organizations approach their work in an impersonal, businesslike spirit, one quite different from the creative individual's impulse to say something that needs saying" (*ibid*:265, 252).

This reinforces my earlier point regarding the distinct ideological motivations of 'younger' agencies: Bogart concerns himself with a pointedly *corporate* media culture populated by tycoons and moguls, whereas truly 'creative' advertising (as a proportion of total agency output) more often finds expression through 'start-up' and breakaway agencies. As a characteristic process in the business, it perpetuates the industry rhetoric of creative freedom, innovation, daring, and simplicity (note, for example, the uncanny similarities between two features on new agencies: 'Gut Instincts', *Advertising Age* October 2, 1989, and 'They Fire Clients, Don't They?' in *Wired* December 1993).

While Bogart notes "the theme of [big] business as a game...the childlike pleasure of manipulation" (quoting, as an example, the executive who referred to his film studio as 'a big toy to play with' *ibid*:252), in advertising at least, such infantile overtones are reserved for new agencies; 'precocious' 'upstarts' staffed by '*enfants-terribles*'. (This is also replicated in creative departments, where several 'junior' teams on probation may be collectively referred to as the 'play-group' or play-pen'.)

John P. Jones (1986) calls for 'much more creative experimentation' in his analysis of the advertising and marketing of brands, yet, as an economist by training, his conception of the advertising process is, both figuratively and literally, somewhat mechanistic. His preference for the presentation of empirical evidence is built on an analogy in which "we can compare the process of marketing a brand to a large and complex piece of mechanical equipment"; the creative advertising element is represented by a smaller apparatus inside the larger one: "although we can see the smaller machine whirring harmoniously, some of the visible details of its construction make no sense to the engineers and craftspeople and the

rest of us observers whose education has taught us to think on rational, logical, and of course predictable lines" (1986:13). Having promised that his analogy "will reappear throughout this book" (*ibid*) it is perhaps inevitable that Jones' ability to explain an alien concept will falter. Indeed he sandwiches his half-page account of the creative process (the 'leap') between 'Strategy' and 'Craft Skills' (the former having little to do with creatives, the latter being presented as a rather prosaic rule-based system inspired by David Ogilvy). No matter; in combination, these three elements constitute 'the writing of advertisements' (Jones 1986:162). Ultimately, Jones places very little significance in the creative process, despite (or perhaps because of) his extensive career as an agency-side brand manager for J. Walter Thompson.

Creative Genesis: The 'Black Box' Incubator

In an environment of 'parity' products which must *still* be differentiated, if not through uniqueness then through invention, the genesis of new ideas becomes all the more important. This aspect of the art directors' and copywriters' role is at once the single most vital, enigmatic, distrusted *and* dismissed element in the entire advertising process. Even creatives themselves will sometimes describe idea generation as an act which is external, or autonomous from, their own conscious *and* physical selves: "The thing about writing theme lines is that, creatively speaking, they almost never just happen when you sit down at the typewriter....Sometimes, though, they come up and surprise you, and that's where the magic is" (Pfiffner in Arlen 1980:14); "I like to have everything up here because your brain starts to sort, and I have to assume that the creative brain does something differently than the non-creative brain" (Interviewee C). The emotive and instinctive impulses associated with ad-making also defy description, even for a highly experienced commercials director: "I like doing beer ads; they have a good feel to them - don't ask me why" (Horn in Arlen 1980:18).

This capacity is clearly indispensable, and yet it most often receives little attention in marketing or advertising texts; furthermore, ad creatives have great difficulty explaining it. The latter issue is of particular interest since even in pointed attempts to *avoid* defining the incubator/box or its contents, both its spatial and temporal dimensions are often hinted at. These can best be illustrated by revisiting some of the comments made during the interviews which were discussed in Chapter Two. For example, negotiating the figurative size of the 'box' is a primary requirement - and a common source of frustration: "Creative personnel frequently claim that strategy is irrelevant to their work....the complaint is that the resulting advertising will be 'boring' because there is no room for exercise of their representational skills" (Slater 1985:222). Furthermore, a 'co-option' of creativity (as "the agency's stock-in-trade") by the client may result in a 'still-born execution' (Fowles 1996:79). The space (or 'size') available has little to do with the size of the agency since creative 'room to manoeuvre' seems to depend more on the willingness of management to suspend, at least temporarily, the impulse to control, direct, or monitor this part of the process.

The box's front edge materializes soon after briefing, when creatives begin to turn their attentions inward, and away from the documentary information provided about the market, the product, the brand, etc., which they "prefer...in the early stages of the process" (Shapiro 1981:370). After accumulated feedback on initial ideas has been received and even welcomed, via focus groups, the creatives "close the door" (Hirschman 1989:46) - both literally and metaphorically. Once incubation has begun, the 'magic' and 'synergy' (Shapiro 1981:37, 258) take over.

The temporal dimension - that is, the 'length' of the box - is ultimately dictated by the agency, and while, for management, this is apparently a period of procrastination or stalling, a certain subconscious percolation reputedly occurs ('internal kinds of iterations' Hirschman 1989:46) even as ideas and 'novel approaches' are discussed or sketched out.

The length (of time required) is always open to conjecture since "[i]ncubation does not take a specific or predictable amount of time" (Shapiro 1981:356).

Slater's contradictory assertions regarding the finitude/infinity of 'possible representations' available to the advertising creative (and *any* cultural intermediary for that matter) can be interpreted as a certain ambivalence: is the black box relatively shallow, or is it *so* deep as to appear bottomless?

Whether, according to the various theories of creative process (Fletcher 1990; Shapiro 1981) the box's end is marked with a 'eureka'-like flash of inspiration, or, somewhat less spectacularly (and more credibly), in a 'variety' of 'professional executions' (Hirschman 1989:46, 47), this is a vulnerable moment, as David Puttnam explains: "Basically creative people are people who are prepared to be judged by their output....'I did that - do you think I'm worthy?' " (in Fletcher 1990:27). Such is the view of a creative interviewed by Shapiro, who says "[e]verything you work on has pieces of you in it. When your work gets rejected, you are getting rejected" (1981:370).

The ties that bind the box into the agency's infrastructure - the larger machine - must not be rigid since, for creatives, 'good agencies' are 'looser' (Shapiro 1981:41). They must, however, also be strong enough to withstand the "actual tensions between commercial logic and creative practice", due to the "strong element of unpredictability" (Slater 1985:248). Indeed, the "ad agency [literally] structures itself to allow high uncertainty, particularly in the early stages of the construction process" (Shapiro 1981:357).

While the entity sketched out above is not meant to represent or replicate the more familiar 'creative process' acknowledged by formal business texts, and dramatized in the movies, the two are often conflated. This section has suggested that the 'black box' is crucial to our understanding of the way in which advertising messages are constructed. Despite the best efforts of semiological analysis, or the rationalist tendencies of commercial endeavour,

there is clearly an aspect of ad genesis which remains an enigma to all parties. It is neither the irrelevant prelude to an arrangement of signs on a page or on screen (in the manner of a jigsaw puzzle, where pre-existing pieces are put together), nor is it simply a matter of (conscious) craft or design. These two points are actually interrelated: bearing in mind that semiotics has almost exclusively dealt with the sign-laden (or merely contrived) advertising images to be found in the print media (i.e. newspapers; magazines; posters), the quote that follows has particular significance. One subject, a creative director who objected to the interviewer's choice of language, said: "I never use the word 'design', by the way, you use it a lot. I use the word 'create'. Because normally you don't design TV commercials, you create them and 'design' is probably a word I'd use for print. It throws me a little and also leads me to answer your question differently than I would have if you'd use create" (Interviewee A). Thus the semiotician's choice of media and more general assumptions about advertising production have a reductive effect, since they implicitly work *against* the notion of an essentially *creative* act.

The Children of Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola?

Reference has been made to the steady erosion of the boundary between what Mark Crispin Miller refers to - tongue-in-cheek - as the 'disciplines' of film- and commercial-making. Product placement (Miller 1990) is only the most practical evidence of a confluence in which ad-creators readily plunder from film (see interviews, Chapter Two) and often hire 'talent' (directors; cinematographers) to realize their concepts. However, it would be wrong to characterize this relationship as one-way; far from it, as Miller points out: "in the era of the VCR it is advertising that has affected cinema, and not the other way around" (1990:50). Indeed, while one senior ad man suggested that "feature films and commercial films...have blended together to the point where it's just film-making", one successful ad director - in clear contrast to the interviewees in Chapter Two - claimed that "[t]here's not a good filmmaker alive who doesn't look to us for inspiration" (*ibid*).

There is clearly little point in arguing for or against either view since plundering film and ransacking ads are simply epiphenomena; indicative of a more fundamental - even universal - development in contemporary culture, for which we can find evidence in the various discourses about advertising.

The mythology of the advertising business maintains that it was once peopled by a new breed of entrepreneurial acolyte who began their careers with lucky breaks - and whose destiny lay in the upper echelons of these mighty bureaucracies, just waiting to be scaled by some bright young thing bursting with potential. Some ad men did indeed start in the mailroom, and the tradition finds peripheral expression in films such as *Nothing in Common* and *Boomerang*. The archetypal 'pyramid climber' starred in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1967 USA), and was a man who ricocheted up the corporate ladder having left his window-cleaning steps far behind. Like the ex-elevator operator (Mayer 1991:97), the 'secret' of their 'success' appeared to be simply a heightened acumen and single-minded ambition.

However, much has changed since this heady and formative era, as a veteran commercials director notes, while complaining about the ever-increasing reliance on marketing data over creative instinct: "You don't get a mix of people. And they teach the kids in school by showing them what's been done in advertising, not in art or literature or communications" (Andreozzi in Mayer 1991:98). By contrast, the substantial educations of the interviewees in Chapter Two stands as testimony to the differences in career progression between past and present. In effect, the consumer culture is at such an advanced stage in its development that many of those younger people working in promotion have been socialized entirely within its temporal boundaries. The ramifications of this assertion are evident in Slater's (1985) complaint about the 'danger' in suggesting that there is any 'distance' or even 'autonomy' between advertising/marketing strategy and signifying practices: "the semiotic field of meanings with which creative workers contend, the raw material of their

representations, is itself the residue of previous commercial interventions, is the language of material culture under commercial capitalism" (1985:252). The main implication of this statement is that Slater's earlier concession, regarding the availability to creatives of a "potentially infinite number of possible representations" (*ibid*:247) is unnecessary, and even untrue. It suggests that the universe of signs is somehow finite; already-known.

Alternatively, and at the very least, we can infer the existence of some kind of semiotic entropy, in which the repeated reliance on the residue of the residue of the residue in a closed 'circuit' leads, ultimately, to a deterioration in the capacity of representations to hold the same 'readable' meaning for a usefully-sized audience. Lacking this vital fixity, signs are then liable to break away from their former anchorage; to float (Wernick 1990) or even to flicker¹⁰. In this frame, of course, the fact that everything has become 'unknowable' obviates further empirical research or critical analysis.

Further Research

The advertising man is here to stay. He is only the purest or most extreme form of the consumption engineer - a type of businessman who will play an ever more important role in the commercial life of economically advanced countries.

Tunstall (1964:20)

This thesis has argued, through the presentation, analysis, and discussion of a variety of (admittedly eclectic) material, that 'commercial creativity' has generally been overlooked in the sociological and communication literature on advertising. Other evidence, such as interviews and a previously-unrecognized genre of movies, suggest that many of the themes discussed have theoretical and cultural relevance.

Advertising's central importance in energizing and perpetuating the emotional (irrational) life of a promotional culture has been lost to the rhetoric of rationalized bureaucracies - and

¹⁰N. Katherine Hayles (1993) 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers' OCTOBER 66, Fall, pp.69-91.

the sociological studies which have often been preoccupied with its creative *output* (at the expense of the human processes involved). It has been claimed that advertising is first and foremost part of a highly visible - yet privileged - dialogue between the cultural intermediaries - and only second, a communicative medium directed at the consumer.

Tunstall's prescient observation about the increasing importance of advertising in 'commercial life' anticipated the emergence of an environment in which the logic of promotion has central importance; in which cultural and economic values are inextricably linked. The importance of trying to understand these developments in new and innovative ways - of questioning the received wisdom of traditional analytical boundaries - cannot be emphasized enough. Paul du Gay's very recent contribution¹¹, entitled *Consumption and Identity at Work*, addresses the confluence of our lives as workers and consumers. Although he has previously written about advertising's cultural intermediaries (Bonner & du Gay 1992) in this instance the focus of attention is the retail business. A comparable study of advertising personnel - in which interviews are oriented to the thesis at hand - may well be of benefit. As has been noted, previous ethnographies of the advertising business have been more concerned with organizational interaction or the distribution of power within it. Future research would be dependent on the development of a research platform designed to accommodate the experience and attitudes of its subjects as workers *and* consumers.

The form of analysis suggested by the brief canon traced through in Chapter Two (through Bourdieu, Featherstone, etc.) would include the occupational, social, and ethical motivations and constraints pertaining to the cultural intermediaries in general. This might take the form of lateral surveys of creative workers in advertising, film, fashion, music, and industrial/packaging/graphic design, for example. Such an undertaking, although considerable, would provide meaningful insight into a hidden 'class fraction' intimately

¹¹ Paul du Gay (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work* London, Sage.

linked to the promotional cultural matrix. The 'authorial' dimension of tasks other than advertising might also be more easy to trace. For example, Angela McRobbie is currently researching the role of young women in popular magazine journalism, and has already reported that they are often informed "political subjects, continually embroiled in debates on the sexual politics of magazine production".¹² Although advertising, and those associated with it, have most usually been the recipient of a superior academic gaze, this distance can no longer be maintained - as the burgeoning debates testify.

The involvement and influence of the intermediaries in the promotional realm is vast. Indeed, in Wernick's formulation, the term 'promotion' "crosses the line between advertising, packaging, and design, and is applicable, as well, to activities beyond the immediately commercial" (1991:181). Even so, whether the intermediaries ultimately constitute useful or worthy 'political subjects' remains to be seen.

Learning From Film

The discussion of film narratives in this thesis has been self-consciously devoid of references to the requisite (and formidable) heritage of film theory. The implicit - and heretical - assumption here has been that because of my interest in these films as popular 'texts', they have been 'read' precisely as such. I maintain that the analysis has been no less fruitful in light of this omission. A recent study on the role of creativity in British film-making complains of "an increasing marginalisation of the issue of creativity to the point where it is no longer recognised" (Petrie 1991:13). In a passage which is striking for its invocation of many of the problems discussed here, Petrie asserts that much writing in film theory has "contained little reference to film-making practices, preferring to concentrate on linguistics, ideology, Lacanian psychoanalysis and general theories of representation" (*ibid*). He therefore announces his "desire to place the study of film and film-making within a social context" (*ibid*:14); this is, in essence, a mainstay of the arguments presented here:

¹² Angela McRobbie (1996) 'All the world's a stage, screen or magazine: when culture is the logic of late capitalism' Media, Culture & Society 18, pp.335-342.

to describe, and finally to climb inside, the black box. It is proposed that this is not so much an enigma as a reservoir of information: values, motivations, influences - not unlike its namesake, the aviation flight recorder.

Williamson's Paradox

The approach to the study of films adopted in this thesis is consistent with that of Judith Williamson (1993). Although she has been referred to here repeatedly because of her seminal work on the study of advertising, she actually considers herself to be "a film critic and not a sociologist" (*ibid*:27). It is perhaps a little puzzling, then, that someone who has done so much to promote the use of semiotics in the analysis of advertising should use such a radically different approach in her writing on film. While she explores movie narratives at length, including plenty of Hollywood releases, there is little indication that she is aware of the ideological codes presumably embedded in *them*. Whereas advertising was heavily incriminated in *Decoding Advertisements* (1978) as a specifically 'non-authored' medium, film is afforded such privileges. In *Deadline at Dawn* (1993), which is largely a collection of her film reviews, she reminds us of its possibilities:

I have...outlined two broad and complimentary approaches to film: you can see it as *symptomatic*, expressing, reflecting, *deflecting* - not necessarily deliberately - key experiences and concerns of the society that produces and consumes it; and you can see it as *strategic*, involving the deliberate use of, and engagement with, the film medium, for some specific aesthetic and/or political purpose....in any film one would expect to employ them both (1993:26).

Such has been the fate of advertising: to be radically implicated to such a successful degree that even those arguing for its 'exoneration' repeat the mistake of failing to grasp the significance of its production as a social practice. Future analysis must therefore endeavour to account for the possibility of 'symptomatic' and 'strategic' impulses in every product created by the cultural intermediaries.

Final Remarks

The production, and *re*-production, of contemporary cultural values increasingly rests with the so-called cultural industries. The post-war fear of conformity or anonymity has given way to a colourful barrage of activity which, thanks to the creative cultural worker, continually enlivens and invigorates the arena of consumption. Uniquely attuned to these fluctuating cultural values, such workers are vanguard consumers in at least two senses: on the one hand they vigorously and selectively consume culture, and on the other, they are voracious consumers of their own privileged discourses.

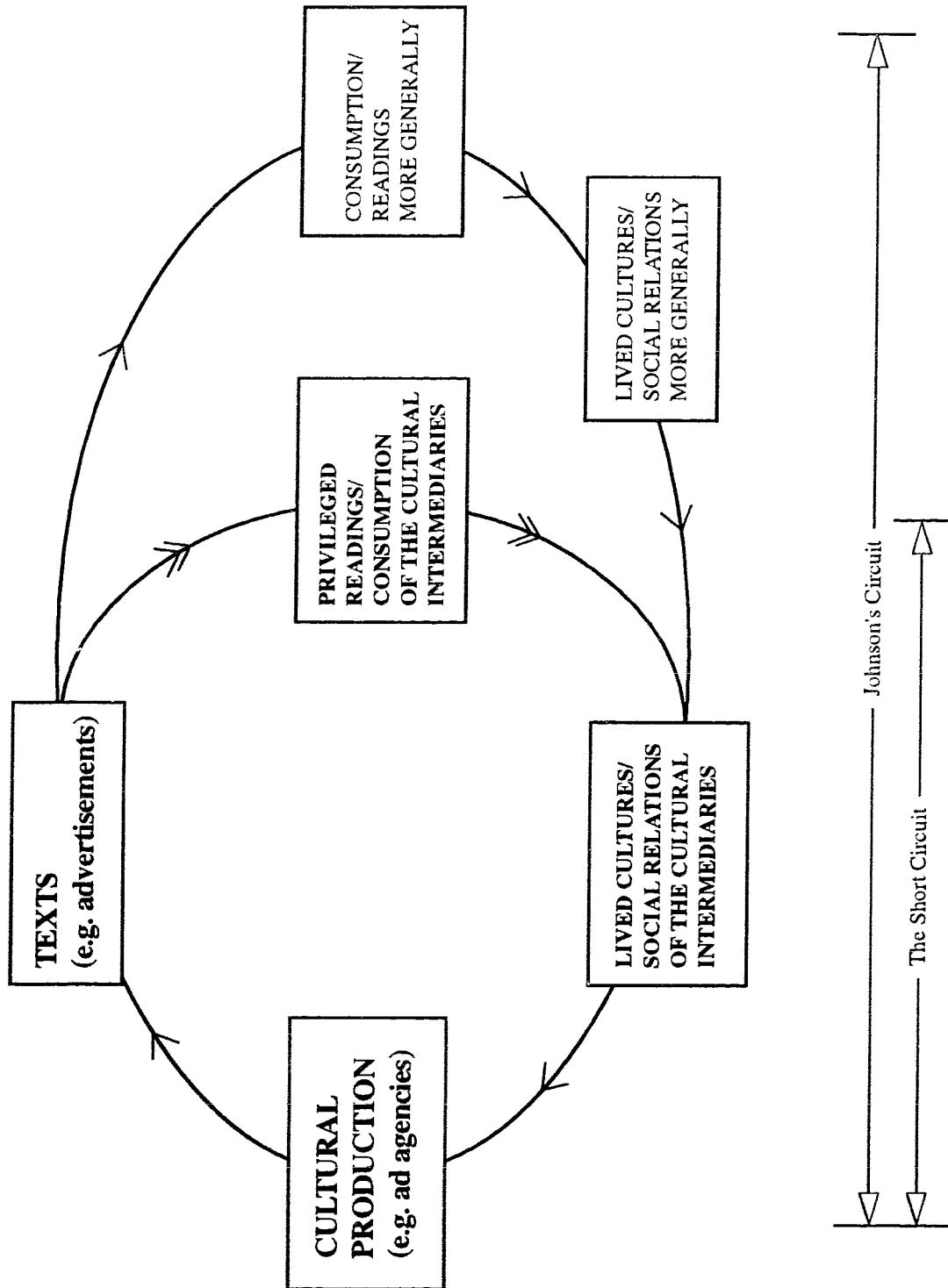
Creatives maintain a certain class position in Johnson's circuit, mainly through their position in the organizational hierarchy: 'getting ahead' or finding a way to 'succeed in business' are as much a part of the commercial creative's mindset as that of the account handler or client manager. Paradoxically, they also constitute a micro-culture determined by an almost bohemian commitment to specific cultural and artistic values, setting them apart from the mainstream bourgeois - with whom they are most closely associated, socio-economically speaking.

In light of these findings, old arguments about the creative worker contributing to all-pervasive banality; merely being a service function in a business enterprise; or (at another extreme) being practitioners of autonomous artistry, are *all* untenable. Conversely, the very considerable contribution of the creative cultural worker in the accelerating cycles of capital can no longer be ignored, *or* misrecognised - as an authorless, or dazzling (yet ultimately meaningless) parade of signs.

Appendix 1. The Short Circuit*

Based on Richard Johnson's 'Circuit of Culture' (Johnson 1986/87)

*The Short Circuit is differentiated using double arrow-heads



**Appendix 2.
English-language Films
about Advertising:
A chronology**

Easiest Way, The	1931 US b&w	Clark Gable Laura Murdock
Thunder In The City	1937 US b&w	Edward G. Robinson Ralph Richardson
Christmas in July	1940 US b&w	Dick Powell Ellen Drew
Turnabout	1940 US b&w	Carole Landis Adolphe Menjou
Take a Letter Darling (aka Green-Eyed Woman)	1942 US b&w	Rosalind Russell Fred MacMurray
Her Husband's Affairs	1947 US	Lucille Ball Franchot Tone
Hucksters, The	1947 US b&w	Clark Gable Deborah Kerr
Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House	1948 US b&w	Cary Grant Myma Loy
Letter to Three Wives, A	1949 US b&w	Kirk Douglas Ann Sothern
It Should Happen To You	1954 US b&w	Judy Holliday Jack Lemmon
Narrowing Circle, The	1955 UK b&w	
I Married a Woman	1956 US b&w	Diana Dors George Gobel
Man in The Gray Flannel Suit, The	1956 US	Gregory Peck Jennifer Jones
Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? (aka Oh! For a Man!)	1957 US	Jayne Mansfield Tony Randall
Lover Come Back	1961 US	Rock Hudson Doris Day
Madison Avenue	1962 US b&w	Dana Andrews Eleanor Parker
Thrill Of It All!, The	1963 US	James Garner Doris Day
Good Neighbor Sam	1964 US	Jack Lemmon Edward G. Robinson
Marriage On The Rocks	1965 US	Frank Sinatra Deborah Kerr
How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying	1967 US	Robert Morse Michele Lee
I'll Never Forget What's 'isname	1967 UK	Oliver Reed Orson Welles
Horse in the Gray Flannel Suit, The	1968 US	Dean Jones Diane Baker
Arrangement, The	1969 US	Kirk Douglas Faye Dunaway
Putney Swope	1969 US b&w/col	Arnold Johnson Antonio Fargas

Think Dirty (aka Every Home Should Have One)	1970	Marty Feldman Shelley Berman
Way We Live Now, The	1970 US	Nicholas Pryor Joanna Miles
Pray For The Wildcats	1974 US	William Shatner Angie Dickinson
Kramer v. Kramer	1979 US	Meryl Streep Dustin Hoffman
Agency (aka Mind Games)	1981 Can.	Lee Majors Robert Mitchum
C.O.D.	1983	
Ploughman's Lunch, The	1983 UK	Jonathan Pryce Tim Curry
Beer (aka The Selling of America)	1985 US	Loretta Switt Rip Torn
Bliss	1985 Aus.	Barry Otto Helen Jones
Coca-Cola Kid, The	1985 Aus.	Eric Roberts Greta Scacchi
Lost in America	1985 US	Albert Brooks Julie Hagerty
Image of Passion	1986	
Nothing in Common	1986 US	Tom Hanks Jackie Gleason
True Stories	1986 US	David Byrne John Goodman
How to Get Ahead in Advertising	1989 UK	Richard E. Grant Rachel Ward
Crazy People	1990 US	Dudley Moore Daryl Hannah
Defending Your Life	1991 US	Albert Brooks Meryl Streep
Boomerang	1992 US	Eddie Murphy Eartha Kitt
DROP Squad	1994 US	Eriq LaSalle Vondie Curtis-Hall
Mr. Write	1994 US	Paul Reiser Jessica Tuck
White Mile	1994 US	Alan Alda
Crash	N/A Can.	James Spader Holly Hunter

**Appendix 3.
English-language Films
about Advertising:
By sub-genre**

Drama

Agency (aka Mind Games)	1981 Can.	Lee Majors Robert Mitchum
Hucksters, The	1947 US b&w	Clark Gable Deborah Kerr
Kramer v. Kramer	1979 US	Meryl Streep Dustin Hoffman
Letter to Three Wives, A	1949 US b&w	Kirk Douglas Ann Sothern
Madison Avenue	1962 US b&w	Dana Andrews Eleanor Parker
Man in The Gray Flannel Suit	1956 US	Gregory Peck Jennifer Jones
Ploughman's Lunch, The	1983 UK	Jonathan Pryce Tim Curry
Way We Live Now, The	1970 US	Nicholas Pryor Joanna Miles

Drama/Satire

Arrangement, The	1969 US	Kirk Douglas Faye Dunaway
Bliss	1985 Aus.	Barry Otto Helen Jones
How to Get Ahead in Advertising	1989 UK	Richard E. Grant Rachel Ward
I'll Never Forget What's 'isname	1967 UK	Oliver Reed Orson Welles
Putney Swope	1969 US b&w/col	Arnold Johnson Antonio Fargas

Comedy/Drama

Beer (aka The Selling of America)	1985 US	Loretta Switt Rip Torn
Nothing in Common	1986 US	Tom Hanks Jackie Gleason
Pray For The Wildcats	1974 US	William Shatner Angie Dickinson

Comedy/Romance

Boomerang	1992 US	Eddie Murphy Eartha Kitt
Crazy People	1990 US	Dudley Moore Daryl Hannah
Good Neighbor Sam	1964 US	Jack Lemmon Edward G. Robinson

Her Husband's Affairs	1947 US	Lucille Ball Franchot Tone
Image of Passion	1986	
I Married a Woman	1956 US b&w	Diana Dors George Gobel
It Should Happen To You	1954 US b&w	Judy Holliday Jack Lemmon
Lost in America	1985 US	Albert Brooks Julie Hagerty
Lover Come Back	1961 US	Rock Hudson Doris Day
Marriage On The Rocks	1965 US	Frank Sinatra Deborah Kerr
Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House	1948 US b&w	Cary Grant Myrna Loy
Take a Letter Darling (aka Green-Eyed Woman)	1942 US b&w	Rosalind Russell Fred MacMurray
Turnabout	1940 US b&w	Carole Landis Adolphe Menjou
Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? (aka Oh! For a Man!)	1957 US	Jayne Mansfield Tony Randall

Comedy

C.O.D.	1983	
Horse in the Gray Flannel Suit, The	1968 US	Dean Jones Diane Baker
Think Dirty (aka Every Home Should Have One)	1970	Marty Feldman Shelley Berman

Related Works

Christmas in July	1940 US b&w	Dick Powell Ellen Drew
Coca-Cola Kid, The	1985 Aus.	Eric Roberts Greta Scacchi
Crash	N/A Can.	James Spader Holly Hunter
Defending Your Life	1991 US	Albert Brooks Meryl Streep
Easiest Way, The	1931 US b&w	Clark Gable Laura Murdock
How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying	1967 US	Robert Morse Michele Lee
Narrowing Circle, The	1955 UK b&w	
Thunder In The City	1937 US b&w	Edward G. Robinson Ralph Richardson
Thrill Of It All!, The	1963 US	James Garner Doris Day
True Stories	1986 US	David Byrne John Goodman

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